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THE FORMS OF IRONY  
IN THE  
PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

by

HILARY THOMPSON

A THESIS

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Forms of Irony in the Plays of Tennessee Williams, submitted by Hilary Thompson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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## ABSTRACT

I propose to study irony in the plays of Tennessee Williams from the viewpoints both of literature and of the theatre. There are three major divisions of this study. The first is the examination of the function of the two forms of mythology--the universal mythology of Southern society and Tennessee Williams' personal system of mythology revealed in a Jungian study--and of the resulting ironical discrepancies found in character presentation. A study of the irony existing in Williams' dramatic techniques of presenting his themes forms the second part, and the third and final section is an exploration of the reasons for a complete change in Williams' philosophy (beginning in approximately 1957) and a study of the ironies found in his present philosophy.





## INTRODUCTION

The study which will form the basis of this thesis is that of the forms of irony, and their relationships, that can be found in Tennessee Williams' plays. The concept of irony which is the foundation stone of my study is that expressed by John F. Ross (Swift and Defoe: A Study in Literary Relationship):

Irony exists not alone in the 'literal' meaning, nor alone in the 'hidden' or 'intended' meaning; it is the effect of the two meanings emerging in simultaneous relationship. That is, A (the 'literal' meaning) plus B (the 'intended' meaning) make up C (the ironic effect).<sup>1</sup>

When this concept of irony is applied to dramatic form one could say that the total form is A, the intention of the author is B, and that the ironic effect C is communicated to the audience when they have experienced the simultaneous relationship and, thus, have had A presented to their senses, and have perceived B with the mind.

Chapter I concerns itself with the content of the plays, specifically with the characters of the plays, and with the ironic effect communicated when the surface appearance of the characters, as figures of universal myth, is challenged by the author's own concept of those figures as characters of the personal mythology of his unconscious mind.

Chapter II concentrates on the ironical effect found in the dramatic forms of presenting character and theme. This ironical effect is gained



by the total relationship of A and B--arising, in the former, from the use of dramatic elements such as roles which are easily recognised, forms of language, and techniques drawn from other arts (of music, painting, dancing and even verse speaking); and in the latter, arising from the intended concepts existing within these dramatic elements: the human actor, the human situation communicated to the audience in the language, and the situations of interactions of characters pointed by the techniques adopted from other arts. The predominating dramatic form is concluded to be melodrama from the surface forms (cited above); but melodrama used for ironical presentation of those concepts intended by the author.

In Chapter III the forms of irony in Williams' early philosophy are studied, together with the dramatic presentation of that philosophy. This presentation reflects the studies <sup>in</sup> Chapter II, and attempts to reveal the ironical method of theatrical art in which the philosophy on the surface presentation of the play is the reverse of that held by the poet. A further irony studied in Chapter III is that the later philosophy develops from the reversal of philosophy in theatrical art. So the negative philosophy in the early forms of Williams' drama has become positive for his later form. The mythologies of Chapter I have now been outgrown and the final ironies to be studied in Chapter III are those of Williams' latest method of dramatic presentation and that found in the later philosophy itself.





## CHAPTER I

### THE IRONICAL USE OF MYTHOLOGY FOR CHARACTER PRESENTATION

The form of irony to be studied in this Chapter will be that of the incongruity between the orthodox conception of Tennessee Williams' characters and Williams' own private system or attitude towards his characters. The orthodox conception of the characters will be the universal myth of a Southern society, which will be explicated later in this Chapter and which will be studied to reveal the ironical incongruity between the universally accepted concept of character and the author's own personal mythology. This last will be examined in the light of Jungian archetypes. This comparison is particularly significant for Williams because his personal mythology is all-pervading and is consistent throughout all his longer plays. I shall first avail myself of the "play theory" of drama which, though admittedly controversial, is particularly suited to my purpose. This purpose is to create a general theoretical framework in which to explore Williams' purpose of ironically contrasting these two forms of mythology.

The relationship between drama and ritual has been the object of much scholarly study, from Jane Harrison's Ancient Art and Ritual (1913) to Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in





culture (1950). Both Huizinga and his fellow Dutchman, Benjamin Hunnigher, agree that the origin of the drama may be found in ritual and that the origin of the ritual may be found in the "play element in culture." The transition from play and ritual to drama takes place imperceptibly. In the ritual an object or action is imitated or re-presented by play. The drama is one step further in development than ritual: the re-presentation of the object or action is in turn actualized (i.e. this process is re-creation not imitation). The movement from ritual to drama is that from direct re-presentation of reality to actualization and recreation of myth. Hunnigher speaks of the change between ritual and drama: "The mimicking rite could gradually adjust itself to the myth's essential miracle. A year-king or year-priest who was slain and lived on in his successor gave way to a hero or demi-god--in the ancient world, for example, Hercules."<sup>1</sup> If Hunnigher has succeeded in defining, at least in theory, the essence of drama as the "actualization of a re-presentation of reality," we can now proceed to examine theatre or the technique of dramatic presentation.

Theatre has the same form of dramatic presentation in both ritual and drama. The process of ritual is "a means of entering the illusion by force, of driving one's way into the Power over the world."<sup>2</sup> The "Unseen" may be interpreted as the unconscious, which indeed



has an uncontrollable power over each individual's world. Dramatic presentation is analogous to Carl G. Jung's concept of individuation or the recognition and mastery of the unknown, unseen, subconscious forces. This definition of theatre is particularly applicable when we read Hunnigher's words:

[the believer] puts on a mask: the bigger, the more exalted that mask was, the more the onlookers and the other dancers were confirmed in their identification of the wearer with, let us say, the rain demon.

Their belief in its turn would work upon him [the dancer], so that their greater intensity in the performance of the ritual would complete, beyond all doubt, the desired union within himself. The mask was thus a matter of prime importance in the accomplishment of unification with the mighty Power.<sup>3</sup>

When drama exists separate from ritual it begins to use myth or the actualization of re-presentation and it is embodying the unknown in an imaginary form which the audience easily recognises. The actor in the modern era would find difficulty in unifying his conscious, or light side, with his unconscious, or dark side. This unification now falls to the audience alone, to be created within themselves; and they must do so, to a large extent, when they leave the auditorium. It could be said that the myth actualized for the audience to recognise and become unified with by the theatrical presentation is a universal myth.

This universal myth is no longer living myth, as it would have been in simple ritual where the unseen expressed is that which develops spontaneously from the fears of the audience, or tribe, as a whole. Instead, the universal myth is a stage beyond a re-presentation of the





unknown, for it is familiar to the audience and has, in fact, conquered those fears by actualizing them. It is thus a myth of the past. There must be a continual creation of myth in order that each generation or age might control its own particular fears, its own particular unknown.<sup>4</sup> In order that drama may exist, the process of using old and new myth together appears to be, in terms of the above theory, imperative. The audience can participate in the presentation by recognising familiar projections and embodiments of conquered fears, while it is stimulated to an awareness of the need to conquer new ones. I am aware that the process could have become reversed and that it could be one in which art creates an awareness of fears which otherwise would not have existed. Herbert Blau faces this fact in The Impossible Theatre when he says that "Nature imitates art; things do become Kafkesque" (21). However, in studying the nature of drama it is my opinion that such a process is necessary, be it artificial or not.

The myths of a previous generation in time cannot become permanent or the myth-making process of conquering the fears of the present situation in time ceases to function successfully. Tennessee Williams has to break through the out-dated myths by challenging them with a new mythology: that consisting of myths which are projected from his own fears of the unknown, of his own subconscious. This challenge is based on irony for it is in the incongruous discrepancy be-



tween the actions of the personal myth and the universal myth in the stage situation that the audience discovers the uselessness of the old myth. An examination of both mythologies and their relationships is the content of the rest of this Chapter.

The nature of the personal myths of the playwright, Tennessee Williams, are revealed best when they are examined in the light of Jungian psychology. The Jungian archetypes of the unconscious that I find of particular relevance to Williams' work are those of the shadow, the anima, the wise old man and the projections of the self. I will study later, in detail, these archetypes and Tennessee Williams' plays. At present I shall proceed to define as clearly as possible what these archetypes signify, and indicate the figures that embody them in the plays.

The archetype of the shadow is that which Frieda Fordham calls "that other side of ourselves, which is to be found in the personal unconscious. . .the primitive, uncontrolled, and animal part of ourselves."<sup>5</sup> The shadow figure thus has the same sex as the possessor of the archetype and is "the natural i. e. instinctive man."<sup>6</sup> There are, throughout Tennessee Williams' plays, figures which consistently realise the image of the shadow. One might conclude, since they are so consistent, that these figures are indicative of the nature of Williams' own shadow. The shadow repeats itself as a virile animalistic young





man--such as Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire, Moony in Moony's Kid Don't Cry, Rosario in The Rose Tattoo, John in Summer and Smoke, and Silva in Baby Doll.

The anima is a more difficult archetype to define for it can appear in different ways such as a hostile, a benevolent or a two-sided figure embodying a man's "collective image of woman. . . with the help of which he apprehends the nature of woman."<sup>7</sup> The two-sided figure is highly relevant to Williams' early plays in which he reveals a paradoxical concept of the dual nature of woman. Frieda Fordham gives a specific definition of the two-sided anima thus:

The anima has a timeless quality--she often looks young, though there is always a suggestion of years of experience behind her. . . . She is also two-sided or has two aspects, a light and a dark, corresponding to the different qualities and types of women; on the one hand the pure, the good, the noble goddess-like figure, on the other the prostitute, the seductress, or the witch.<sup>8</sup>

This paradoxical double nature is revealed in Williams' early heroines and the very fact that they recur in a number of his plays would seem to clarify their origin as projections of the anima. The fact of the origin of these heroines is proven by the nature of those women among whom the playwright lived as a child and who would have added to the nature of the anima.<sup>9</sup> It will be necessary that I make further divisions among these figures but at present the characters that I find representative of the anima are--Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, Alma in Summer and Smoke, Amanda and Laura in The Glass Menagerie, Maggie in Cat





on a Hot Tin Roof, and Hannah and Maxine in The Night of the Iguana.

The third archetype which I must attempt to define is that of the wise old man. Jung felt this archetype was that of "meaning," but Frieda Fordham is more explicit when she tells of the figure and "the seemingly magical power and wisdom that it holds."<sup>10</sup> The obvious representative figure of the wise old man appears as Nonno in The Night of the Iguana. I could also define the sexless Southern spinster as this same figure when she appears as Aunt Rose in The Long Stay Cut Short and Aunt Nonnie in Sweet Bird of Youth.

The final archetype I shall examine is that figure stemming from the experience of the awareness of the self. It appears as a child or young man, "sometimes a divine or magical child, sometimes an ordinary figure, or even a ragamuffin. . . . At the other extreme comes the figures of Christ and Buddha."<sup>11</sup> The image becomes more complex with the introduction of such figures as Christ and Buddha, but Jung clarifies the archetype when he says:

Further transformations run true to the hero myth. . . . The identification is often extremely stubborn and dangerous to the psychic equilibrium. If it can be broken down and consciousness can be reduced to human proportions, the figure of the hero can gradually be differentiated into a symbol of self.<sup>12</sup>

The early figures of the drama such as the Young Man representing Life Incorporated in The Case of the Crushed Petunias, and Val in Orpheus Descending are definite projections of self with Christ-like



tones--of innuendo in the first, and of outright statement in the last. The figures of Chance in Sweet Bird of Youth and Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof are removed from identification with self to a symbol of self. Finally Shannon in The Night of the Iguana and Chris, the angel of death in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More, are symbols of those ideals which the self holds.

Tennessee Williams seems to possess a clear concept of the figure of his personal mythology that he wishes each character to represent. The appearance of each figure is immensely important to him and also to the construction of his plays. Thus the character is given a clear and detailed outline in the stage directions of the play before any action takes place. This method of describing his personal mythology should make the actor conscious of the exact figure he is to portray and should make the nature of the figure explicit to the audience by the actor's appearance alone.

Stanley Kowalski (A Streetcar Named Desire) enters "roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes"<sup>13</sup>; his rough masculinity is enhanced by the stage property that Williams uses at this point, namely a bloody package of meat which he has in his hands and which, symbolically enough, he throws to his wife Stella. The instinctive, animalistic masculinity of this "shadow" character is clarified further by a later stage direction:





Stanley throws the screen door of the kitchen open and comes in. He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed bearer.<sup>14</sup>

The qualities of the shadow archetype, the dark side of man, are blatantly revealed in this passage and continue to be so whenever Stanley and his cronies are described. They are "at the peak of their physical manhood;" the consistent quality they possess is physical strength and the prime factor in their nature is masculinity, for these men are "as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors" they are wearing.<sup>15</sup> Stanley's animalistic qualities reveal themselves in the happenings of the plot and in the words other characters use of his behaviour. Thus he "bellows" like a "baying hound" for his mate and she calls him "drunk--drunk--animal thing, you!"<sup>16</sup> when he offers her violence.

This same physically strong, sex-orientated, animalistic male appears as Moony in Moony's Kid Don't Cry. He is described in terms that strangely coincide with those which introduce Stanley: he is "a strongly built young workingman."<sup>17</sup> Moony's animality also reflects Stanley's for it too is found in his reaction to his mate: "[he] bellows like a mad animal. Roars and lunges forward--clutches Jane by throat."<sup>18</sup>



These figures, Moony and Stanley, are very definite projections of the shadow archetype. John (Summer and Smoke) and Silva (Baby Doll) have the same qualities of instinctive animality but the image has become more subtle and has progressed in development. Silva uses the "magnetism of the young male" to aid his cunning schemes; John maintains his animal energy from the beginning to the end of the play, even as he accomplishes his personal solution to the problem of this animal energy. Thus he is introduced as the adult John: "The excess of his power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one it will burn him up. At present he is unmarked by the dissipations in which he relieves his demoniac unrest."<sup>19</sup> Stanley is the gaudy seed-bearer; John is, similarly, compared to Prometheus, the legendary creator of mankind, who fashioned the first man with earth and water--those elements pertaining strictly to the flesh. Prometheus has to his fame the legend of stealing from Olympus the fire that he brought to mankind. The very title of the play, Summer and Smoke, is perhaps indicative of the fire that John brought to Alma. Earth and water, the elements of the flesh, and fire, the element of passion, are the essential characteristics of John, the animalistic, instinctive man: the representative of the shadow who moans that "All summer I've sat around here like this, remembering last night, anticipating the next one."<sup>20</sup> The solution that John finds does not change his nature. He remains the





intensely physical man who "rains kisses on Nellie's forehead and throat and lips,"<sup>21</sup> yet he is made aware of the spiritual element in man, and in himself, by Alma, the anima figure in Summer and Smoke.

The heroines in Williams' plays that I consider represent anima figures can be divided into three groups: first, the corporate anima figure in which the complementary qualities of virginity and seductiveness, of soul and body, are combined; second, the somewhat sexless and yet ideal figure who gives a form of spiritual love generously (i. e. the benevolent anima); and third, the highly sexed yet ungenerous figure who is the opposite of the benevolent anima (i. e. the hostile anima). Blanche and Alma come into the first group; Maggie, Carol, and, to a lesser extent, Heavenly, are figures which are drawing towards the second group; Hannah, Blackie, Laura and Catherine are of the second group; Maxine, Baby Doll and Mrs. Goforth are of the third group, with Amanda portraying some of the qualities of that group also. The anima figure is two-sided: "on the one hand the pure, the good, the noble goddess-like figure, on the other the prostitute, the seductress or the witch."<sup>22</sup> Blanche (A Streetcar Named Desire) is this corporate anima.

Reflected in her idealism of mankind is a nobility of the "golden kind."

Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image--but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag!<sup>23</sup>





A disparity exists between this noble speech and Blanche's continual dwelling in a self-made world of illusion. The irony, however, is not just that Blanche is self-deluded but that Williams' own attitude to life is strangely akin to Blanche's romantic idealism. In his foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams elaborates on man's situation and posits the theory, optimistically, that man at some time in the future will be found to be noble, while he admits that he is pessimistic about the present situation and that he can only find guilt, and not nobility, in the present state of man. This ironical duality of attitude towards life is illustrated in A Streetcar Named Desire. Blanche, in illusion, clings to her optimism that man is noble despite the ravages of a hostile present situation. Thus this attitude allows us to presume that the noble side of Blanche is noble and that it is not simply madness but that it represents the benevolent anima part of her dual anima nature. Williams' philosophy and the form of irony found therein will be further examined and elaborated in Chapter III of this thesis.

The other side of the anima figure, the prostitute and seductress, is not merely latent in Blanche. She is well practised in her art:

Blanche: Hey! (He turns back shyly. She puts a cigarette in a long holder.) Could you give me a light? (She crosses to him. They meet at the door between the two rooms.)

Young Man: Sure. [He takes out a lighter.] This doesn't always work.

Blanche: It's temperamental? [It flares.] Ah! - Thank you.

Young Man: Thank you! [He starts away again.]

Blanche: Hey! [He turns again, still more uncertainly. She goes close to him.] What time is it?



Young Man: Fifteen of seven.

Blanche: So late? Don't you just love these long rainy afternoons in New Orleans when an hour isn't just an hour--but a little bit of eternity dropped in your hands--and who knows what to do with it?<sup>24</sup>

The dream-like and poetic qualities of that last speech of Blanche enhance her image of the gracious Southern beauty while they also gratify her other self--the wanton seductress. She explains to Stella the need to combine illusion and grace with seduction:

I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft--soft people have got to court the favor of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive--put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and glow--make a little--temporary magic just in order to pay for--one night's shelter!<sup>25</sup>

Ironically this self-deceiving character is only too realistically aware of the reason for her deception of others. Around this self-deception lies another irony, for the audience perceives pretense in Blanche from that which is, for her, reality.

Why is the illusion of grace and virtue a reality for Blanche?

It is so for two reasons: first, it acts as that element of schizophrenia which ironically permits the two sides of the anima, the soul and the body, the virgin and the wanton, to exist in one character [of split personality]; second, it supplies that quality of timelessness inherent in the anima figure. In Blanche, Williams has found the character which embodies the paradoxical corporate anima image.

This same image recurs as Alma in Summer and Smoke. Alma is a Blanche at an earlier stage of development. Romanticism of the





doctor's profession, and through it of the intelligence of man used to improve himself, is part of the nobility of attitude possessed by this figure.

Most of us have no choice but to lead useless lives! But you have a gift for scientific research! You have a chance to serve humanity. Not just to go on enduring for the sake of endurance, but to serve a noble, humanitarian cause, to relieve human suffering.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the nobility of these sentiments, Alma is not all soul. She, like Blanche, has schizophrenic qualities. John's diagnosis of the "sickness" Alma suffers is a "doppelganger," or another self trapped inside this repressed "noble-goddess figure."<sup>27</sup> The two people in Alma are of fire and passion or of the body; and of smoke and spirit or of the soul. Again we have the complete dual anima figure. Alma's powers of seduction are feeble compared with those of Blanche but this does not mean that the qualities of the future prostitute are absent. She illustrates these qualities with words rather than deeds: "One time I said 'no' to something. . . . But now I have changed my mind. . . ." She then proceeds to describe the conversation between her two selves, "I said, 'But what about pride?' - She said, 'Forget about pride whenever it stands between you and what you must have!'"<sup>28</sup>

These two figures of Alma and Blanche and of Serafina also, have been what I have called corporate images of the anima archetype, i.e., they reflect both aspects of it, as defined by Frieda Fordham. Of the



last two divisions of female figures representing the anima, each corresponds to one aspect of the anima. Each figure represents either the spiritual or the sensuous element, for the anima has split and has become two characters instead of one. That this should happen was imperative for the development of Williams' drama, otherwise his heroines, the central figures of the earlier drama, could have become stereotyped and caused a dearth of new material in his plays.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More is Williams' latest full length play. The figures in it which represent the now split anima are Mrs. Goforth and her companion-secretary, Blackie. Blackie is a somewhat sexless spinster who has an infuriating habit (for Mrs. Goforth) of asking metaphysical questions at the wrong time--such as "How can you prove what's not true?"; she also describes Mrs. Goforth's illness directly as "a chest abscess," which description her employer terms "putting the bad mouth on me."<sup>29</sup> The figure of Blackie is that of the benevolent anima with a reassuring and experienced outlook on life, as well as a spiritual sensitivity and generosity towards her fellow men.

Mrs. Goforth is the exact opposite of Blackie. She was carnal and wanton in her younger life and still tries to be so; thus she sickens the audience by her attempted seduction of a young man on her deathbed.





Mrs. Goforth is a projection of the anima and is a hostile figure lacking in any feeling. She makes the centre of her world her own physical needs and desires, and is in fact the "uncharitable prostitute."

This same couple appears in the play preceding The Milk Train . . . . . , namely The Night of the Iguana. Maxine, the highly-sexed and frustrated widow, owner of the Costa Verde hotel, is the representative of the hostile anima in this play.

Mrs. Maxine Faulk, the proprietor of the hotel, comes round the turn of the verandah. She is a stout, swarthy woman in her middle forties--affable and rapaciously lusty. She is wearing a pair of levis and a blouse that is half unbuttoned.<sup>30</sup>

Maxine's "simple, sensuous nature" should be apparent to the audience on her initial entry, and this first impression of "the Widow Faulk" is strengthened by her behaviour as the action progresses: she offends the over-sensitive Shannon with her immodest appearance.

Maxine: Well! Lemme look at you!

Shannon: Don't look at me; get dressed!

Maxine: Gee, you look like you had it!

Shannon: You look like you been having it, too.. Get dressed!<sup>31</sup>

She proceeds to reveal her lack of consideration or sympathy when talking about her late husband, who only died two weeks before:

Dear old Fred was always a mystery to me. He was so patient and tolerant with me that it was insulting to me. A man and a woman have got to challenge each other, y'know what I mean. I mean I hired these diving-boys from the Quebrada six months before Fred died, and did he care? Did he give a damn when I started night-swimming with them? No. He'd go night-fishing, all night.<sup>32</sup>





Maxine's sensuous, sexual nature is entirely lacking in outward generosity with her affections. She is the self-centered, sex-centered hostile anima whose appetite must be assuaged by Shannon.

The opposite anima to Maxine, the benevolent anima, is represented by Hannah Jelkes in The Night of the Iguana. If one recalls Frieda Fordham's description of the anima as "timeless," "young" but also experienced and then compares it with the stage direction introducing Hannah, one has an almost identical figure. "Hannah is remarkable looking--ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine and androgynous looking--almost timeless."<sup>33</sup> The first three lines of the quotation contain echoes of Alma Winemuller in Summer and Smoke. Alma's noble goddess quality stems from her concept of man, standing majestically reaching to heaven like a Gothic cathedral. Hannah is in fact a representative of all that is noble and worthwhile in man's nature. In Summer and Smoke, John's assessment of Alma in her innocent benevolent anima state is that she is so noble that she is untouchable. Shannon's physical reaction to Hannah is reminiscent of that of John:

Shannon: I could do it with Mrs. Faulk, the inconsolable widow, but I couldn't with you.<sup>34</sup>

One can detect a development in the personal mythology of Tennessee Williams, especially in the anima archetype when the schizophrenic



corporate anima splits into two separate figures: the benevolent anima and the hostile anima. This split in the anima has an ironic function, for the benevolent anima is contrasted with the Southern spinster figure of the universal myth and the hostile anima can be compared with the Southern gentlewoman, while the characters with shades of both are at times comparable with the Southern virgin. These figures of universal myth will be examined later in the chapter.

The next archetype to be examined is that of the wise old man, who incorporates a "seemingly magical power and wisdom."<sup>35</sup> The obvious representative of this archetype can be found in the old poet Nonno in The Night of the Iguana. The poet can have a mystical quality of insight about him which makes him a magical figure when he is compared with the 'ordinary' man. Nonno is not simply a poet but a proud and noble old man. His age does not cause a deterioration in his nobility, as it possibly would in a more realistic figure; he, the archetypal figure is neither hypocritical nor senile for "there is a good kind of pride and he has it.(28)" Age is not always the most respected quality and yet there is nothing derogatory about the old man. The power and magic of the poet are also, here, the power and magic of a courageous wise man drawing near to death; to death, the levelling quality which all men, poets or not, must face. And Nonno is admirably brave in his recitation of his last poem when he is about to die:





A chronicle no longer gold,  
 A bargaining with mist and mould,  
 And finally the broken stem  
 The plummeting to earth; and then

An intercourse not well designed  
 For beings of a golden kind  
 Whose native green must arch above  
 The earth's obscene, corrupting love.

And still the ripe fruit and the branch  
 Observe the sky begin to blanch  
 Without a cry, without a prayer,  
 With no betrayal of despair.<sup>36</sup>

The wisdom and the mysticism of age are imparted to Aunt Rose in The Unsatisfactory Supper. Aunt Rose has little to define her sex except her cooking ability, and thus can be the "wise old" sexless woman. Her wisdom is in her appreciation of the "poems of nature," the roses, and her magic in the mystical conclusion to the play when Aunt Rose and the rose bush become one:

She looks wonderingly at the sky, then back at the house beginning to shrink into darkness, then back at the sky from which the darkness is coming, at each with the same unflinching but troubled expression. . . . The flimsy gray scarf is whipped away from her shoulders. She makes an awkward gesture and sinks to her knees. Her arms let go of the roses. . . . One or two she catches. . . . Aunt Rose's figure is still pushed toward the rose-bush.<sup>37</sup>

When Aunt Rose is placed beside the callous and ungenerous couple, Baby Doll and Archie Lee, her wisdom and love of something more important than "eggs birmingham" becomes more obvious. This same figure is repeated in the motion picture Baby Doll and in Sweet Bird of Youth as Aunt Nonnie. Exactly what the connection between Nonnie



and Nonno is I cannot say for sure, unless the name has some autobiographical significance. These "old" figures portray an awareness of the mystic beyond everyday reality; Nonno as a poet, Aunt Rose, with her mystical awareness of beauty, and Aunt Nonnie with her love in a loveless society.

The projections of self are the final archetypes of the unconscious that I am to examine. I shall begin with the most blatant projections of self, Val in Orpheus Descending and A Battle of Angels,<sup>38</sup> and the Young Man in The Case of the Crushed Petunias. This latter figure is a male stranger, who could be an angel, who frees the constricted spinster from the village of Priman-proper to the "Highway 77" of "Life, Incorporated."

This "stranger" figure recurs in Orpheus Descending, bringing new values to a small community with conventional attitudes. Williams tells us that he finds himself in the play--when he explains his attachment for it:

Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years, in fact? Well nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call Orpheus Descending. On its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop.<sup>39</sup>

If Val, then, is a definite projection of self, what form does he take? He is "a young man, about thirty, who has a kind of wild beauty



about him" (16): and who "descends" like an angel into the Under-world of a small Southern community. He is Orpheus and, incongruously enough, Christ, in one figure; magical and beautiful, he plays the guitar to "wash [him]" (37) and thus the incongruous Christian implications of cleansing with water, as in the baptism, are revealed. Val is thirty years of age--and this is, of course, drawing close to the age of Christ at his crucifixion. The age is stressed in the stage directions again and again, and in the action itself by Val--"this is my thirtieth . . . I'm not young any more!" (33). The magical figure of Christ is one of the manifestations of the projection of the self.<sup>40</sup> This play carries through the connection between Christ and Val even to the final murder concluding the action. In the earlier version, The Battle of Angels, Vee Talbot actually chooses Val for Christ in her painting of "Christ and the twelve apostles." The reference to Christ is still traceable, though it is far more subtle, in the later version, Orpheus Descending.

--What's that, what's he got?

--A BLOWTORCH!

--Christ

[ a momentary hush ]

--Come on, what in hell are we waiting for?

--Hold on a minute, I wanta see if it works!

--Wait, Wait!

--LOOK here!

. . . . .

--Christ!

--It works.<sup>41</sup>





The snakeskin jacket also takes on Christian connotations, as the robe which was left at the crucifixion and which performed miracles: so the jacket breaks down old laws with the free-thinking of "the fugitive kind."

The hero--Val--becomes the "lost" hero in Sweet Bird of Youth and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Now the handsome hero is ravaged by life instead of ruling it. It is because of his dependence on liquor, that which has ravaged him, that Brick has no choice but to submit to his wife's love-making. This submission is more unwilling in the first version of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; it has no conciliatory "I admire you, Maggie" to gratify the audience at the conclusion of the Broadway version. For Chance death will come by castration because his life as a gigolo has ravaged him and, through him, his beautiful "girl," to whom he gave syphilis; moreover, her male relations have vowed to castrate him. In their physical appearance both hero characters are unravaged and both are similar. Brick, just as the archetype requires, is "still slim and firm as a boy. His liquor hasn't started tearing him down outside."<sup>42</sup> Chance has a "'ravaged young face' and yet it is still exceptionally good-looking. His body shows no decline."<sup>43</sup> Chance does not avoid his fate but rather faces it as an act of self-sacrifice; Brick avoids Maggie until the final capitulation of self to her stronger and dominant figure.

To recapitulate so far on the subject of the projections of self



in Williams' plays: the figure of Val and that of Life Incorporated are both heroic figures of self-identification. The author endows the self-projection of the hero with the qualities of Christ, bringing new life to the half-alive (Life Incorporated) and suffering martyrdom for his beliefs (Orpheus Descending). The hero is less heroic and less removed from reality in Sweet Bird of Youth and in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Brick and Chance both have the qualities of self-sacrifice but neither are Christ figures as is Val. There has been a development of the figures projected from the self: that development is from heroic identification to self-projection in non-heroic and in more realistic figures.

The last two figures of self in Tennessee Williams' plays, The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More, are Shannon and Chris Flanders. The wisdom of courage and the strength to endure is that learned by Shannon from Hannah, with her infallible sense of experience, and from Nonno, with his magical wisdom. It enables Shannon to accept his final inevitable capitulation to the hostile anima, Maxine.

There are two points here that help to identify Shannon and Tennessee Williams. The first point is Shannon's need to endure. It was in the Macon Period of 1942 that Williams wrote a notebook in which such Shannon-like phrases as:





effort and endurance--thirst of the body and of the heart that I cannot slake any longer. Am I beginning to walk across a long desert under a merciless sun? --If I am become my enemy at last--my own relentless antagonist--what is the use? I must quit the effort to create for a while and retrench on something like mere endurance. Make a solemn compact with myself and on no account break it--to relax for a while and vegetate and let my nerves feed up. I don't dare do otherwise for death or madness are nearer than a myth.<sup>44</sup>

One can see from these passages that this lesson of endurance was one that Williams himself learnt in a period of mental breakdown--just as Shannon had to.

Apart from mere autobiography there are more suggestions of the psychological projection of Tennessee Williams' self in the figure of Shannon. The supernatural in Shannon comes to the audience's awareness when "a clear shaft of light stays on Shannon's reaching-out hands,"<sup>45</sup> and he is conscious of his God, mainly because of his present neurotic sensitivity. This neuroticism, however, puts him in a different light from any other of Williams' tragic heroes. The sacrifice of Val, Chance and Brick is present in him, but the urge to be sacrificed is not fulfilled. Instead Hannah brings to his notice the "almost voluptuous. . . way that you twist and groan in that hammock--no nails, no blood, no death" (89). The awareness requires an acceptance of self-identification with Christ for Shannon. This is one step removed from Val in Orpheus Descending who is identified by the playwright as Christ. If Val is, as I think, a projection of self then there is, as Jung describes, the identification of the self,



here Williams, with Christ. It is as if Williams has become aware of his self-projections and has incorporated the awareness within another self-projection. However, this change means that Williams is attempting to distance himself from his creations while embodying his philosophy of endurance in them.

This philosophy that Shannon learnt from the benevolent anima and the wise old man becomes concretized into another figure or symbol of self: namely Chris in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More. He is an allegorical figure, identifiable with "The Angel of Death," as the Witch (a society lady who visits Mrs. Goforth) explains:

One night that wicked old Duke of Parma, you know the one we call the Parma Violet, he emptied a champagne bottle on Christopher's head and he said, "I christen thee, Christopher Flanders, the 'Angel of Death.'"<sup>46</sup>

This title is more apt when Chris explains his vocation is aiding the dying to find the endurance to make the final leap in the dark. The first occasion that Chris aided the dying thus occurred before he chose his vocation as the "Angel of Death," and as a result of this first occasion the Hindu teacher told him such a vocation was fitting to his nature. The step ~~has~~ finally been made and the hero figure has become an abstract symbol of self. Chris is a symbol of self in that the quality he represents is that of endurance learnt by Williams himself and practised by him.

Thus far I have examined the projections of archetypal figures





which appear to me to compose the personal mythology found in Tennessee Williams' plays. I have stopped my study at The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More, Williams' last long play, and I will concentrate on the collections of short plays (The Slapstick Tragedy and The Dragon Country) in my final chapter. There I shall examine the forms of irony in Williams' personal philosophy and his further development, when he attempts to embody that philosophy in a dramatic form. The figures that I have attempted to place within the archetypes I have just examined will now be re-examined in the light of the universal mythology of Southern societal structure to reveal the irony inherent in the discrepancy between the two mythologies. The figures of this universal mythology will be the Southern virgin, the Southern gentlewoman (the married woman), the Southern spinster, and the young man who depicts the American dream. I will attempt to show that this universal mythology of the South is based on sexuality and, paradoxically, on Puritanism.

Alma and Blanche are purportedly figures of the Southern virgin. However, the downfall of the former and the actions of the latter show that they are very much the paradoxical opposite of that false category which they would, on the surface, represent. It is Faulkner in Absalom, Absalom! who has Mr. Compson speak of these false divisions of the female sex in Southern society:





The other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction--ladies, women, females--the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom the first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it owed the very fact of its virginity.<sup>47</sup>

Considering Blanche's situation in the light of this ironical passage leads one to accept another irony: that Blanche, who belongs to the courtesan group, is attempting to aspire to "the first caste" by crossing the chasm the wrong way.

Blanche and Alma are corporate anima figures of schizophrenic women captured by the Southern myth of the virgin. Virginity has a perverse and ironic sexual appeal which one can see when Faulkner talks of the virgins as "chosen young girls in white dresses bound at the waist with crimson sashes,"<sup>48</sup> for here in this description is the latent passion (crimson) below the white purity of the Southern virgin. Whether the passion is purely dormant and requires the perverse sexual response of the John Buchanan's to awaken it or whether it is a part of the mature female herself is difficult to determine. The final result, however, is one of schizophrenic awareness of both sides of a woman's nature for both Alma and Blanche. As a result of this dichotomy in her nature, Blanche's virginity is illusion; Alma is in a virgin state which is false for her until her final capitulation to passion and "the doppelganger" or her other self.



The most vicious and direct attack on Southern virginity comes via the figures of Heavenly and Boss Finley in Sweet Bird of Youth. Heavenly, herself aware of her state after the operation for syphilis as "an old childless woman," (60) will be incongruously used by her father as an "example of white southern youth" and "wearing the stainless white of a virgin"<sup>49</sup> to convince the political audience of the need to avoid "blood pollution." Heavenly thus undergoes an ironic reversal of the dichotomy process to which Alma and Blanche were subjugated. She is a healthy, passionate girl forced into the role of the Southern virgin by the demands of that myth in Southern society, those demands being represented by her politically-minded father. In relation to the anima concept Heavenly is the honest passionate woman like Maggie; she is not a hostile anima because of love for the subject of her passion. The irony operative here is that those women held captive by the old myth of the Southern virgin become schizophrenic as a result of that myth's lack of reality; those free of the myth can aid society because they are healthy, able to accept and understand their own passionate natures and also to sacrifice for the loved one--which can cause a reversal of the situation--to bondage within the myth.

More irony is gathered around the figure of Laura in The Glass Menagerie. Laura is a true virgin in Southern society. Pure and





innocent, she is nevertheless, like her own unicorn, a freak. Amanda's concept of virginity is that which charms gentlemen callers into marriage. When confronted with the delicate ideal of the myth, her mother can only fear that she is doomed to virginity for the rest of her life. Thus we have the realization of the myth of the Southern virgin, who is living in the past and who is caught up in a world of glass. Laura and Rose, Williams' sister, are almost the same figure. It is as if the myth of the virgin, when carried into practice, causes insanity. Rose is part of Williams' anima concept. It is impossible to be definite as to her exact qualities in that concept, but when she is placed beside Amanda, in the form of Laura, the former being, to a certain extent, a hostile anima, then one can posit the theory that her qualities are predominantly benevolent.

The Southern gentlewoman is a synonym for the Southern married woman. This figure revolves around contact with her family; her relationships with her husband and those with her sons are the most important to her. If one thinks of Amanda, Mrs. Venable, Mae, and Mrs. Compson, one can discover the characteristics of the figure in Southern eyes. The Southern gentlewoman finds her relationship with her son more rewarding than that with her husband, where any such relationship does exist. The sense of family continuity is important to her and this may explain the relationship.



The figures of Mrs. Venable, Big Mama, Mae--in some qualities and also some qualities of Amanda and Mrs. Goforth are all figures of the hostile anima. As such they have no qualities of sensitivity and gentleness, but instead their own sensuous pleasure forms the core of their lives. Mrs. Goforth and Amanda are constantly talking of past sexual habits and conquests; whereas Big Mama and Mrs. Venable have both ruined their sons sex lives by a perverse kind of mother dominance which causes homosexuality, Carl Jung defines this mother-son relationship as one of the son honouring the mother by becoming a homosexual for her sake.<sup>50</sup> This dominance of the Southern lady by a perverse sexual appeal to her sons for protection is also reminiscent of Mrs. Compson and her words: "It's my place to suffer for my children. . . I can bear it."<sup>51</sup>

The older married woman, such as Maxine, is the hostile anima because of her destructive sexuality. In the rules of the universal mythology of the South a married woman is a successful woman, and yet this married woman, like Mrs. Goforth, places her own sexual satisfaction at the centre of her life. Thus she must insult and destroy her less highly sexed husband by openly taking lovers and finally, because she is not even satisfied with lovers, she must own Shannon. Placed beside this failure in Williams' personal mythology is the figure of failure in the universal mythology: the Southern spinster. The Southern



spinster is the spiritually successful figure in Williams' personal mythology. The old Southern myth that a married woman has gained success is based on a sexual evaluation of life and Williams challenges the universal myth with his own personal mythology of this figure: namely the hostile anima who bases her success on sexual destruction. In Williams' personal mythology success is a spiritual thing and the figure of the Southern spinster finds that success.

I've seen such pitiful cases in the South--barely tolerated old spinsters living, upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband and brother's wife!--stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room--encouraged by one sister-in-law to visit another--little bird-like women without any nest--eating the crust of humility all their life!<sup>52</sup>

This is the Southern spinster seen through the Southern eyes of Amanda. The figure is repeated in Williams' work as Aunt Rose, Aunt Nonnie, Blanche and Hannah. All but the latter of these figures suffer the humiliation of patronage from relatives; all are unwanted and redundant in Southern society.

Contrary to the myth, the Southern spinster presented by Williams is aware of something worth living for beyond the suffering of the present. Rose and Nonnie are figures of the "wise old man" in Williams' personal mythology. They have abundant love and communion with the beautiful. Blanche is fully conscious of man's complete nature; of his ability to rise above "the brutes": --and this enables her to continue living with hope, even though such hope can only





exist, in the present state of man, in a world of illusion and madness. Hannah recognises that her lack of sexuality removes the possibility of not leading a spinster's life. She, nevertheless, paradoxically has all the wisdom of the benevolent anima; she who should be dejected and foolish because of her lack of sexual experience and fulfillment.

The Puritan work ethic, that has as its basis the belief that hard work means success, produces the concept of the masculine figure who has succeeded in terms of the ethic; I shall refer to this figure as the American dream. There are two candidates with the potential to become the figure of the universal myth called the American dream, namely John and Stanley (Summer and Smoke and A Streetcar Named Desire). John has the intellect, the ability, and the energy to fulfil this dream, and he finally embodies it in the eyes of the townspeople when he has "stamped out the fever and gotten all the glory."<sup>53</sup> Stanley also has the potential to fulfil the dream. Stella defines the forces which could make Stanley a success: "Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere. . . . It's a drive that he has."<sup>54</sup> Running counter to these figures in the universal mythology we have the ironical incongruity of their place in Williams' personal mythology: namely, that both are figures of the shadow archetype. They are the instinctive, animalistic males who are lacking in an aware-



ness of the spiritual side of man and, as a result, they destroy those who are aware of that side: namely, Alma and Blanche.

Brick, Chance, Val, Shannon, and even Chris are failures of the universal mythology. In its light Brick is a drunkard who gives up his ambitions because of his disillusionment; Chance is a gigolo who has not succeeded in the theatre despite his potential and his hard work--and who dies an utter failure, in any material sense of the word; Val is a vagabond, accused of rape from the outset of the play; Shannon is a defrocked priest who finally agrees to marry the fallen sinful woman; Chris is an artist, who could be accused of being a gigolo--and who is obsessed with the vocation of helping others, particularly rich old women, to die. Yet each one of these failures in the universal mythology is a successful figure in Williams' personal mythology: Brick has become aware of the realities of life; Chance will die bravely for his sins in a monstrous world; Val dies also, martyred in the cause of the fugitive kind; Shannon has learnt to endure that of which Brick becomes aware, the realities of life; and Chris makes that endurance, and the teaching of others to endure, his vocation. Although these characters, who are projections of the self, may be counted as failures when judged in the scale of the universal myth of the American dream, nevertheless they succeed in terms of Williams' personal myth.





This irony is compounded by the fact that the figures who succeed in the American dream are, correspondingly, failures for Williams in that they are projections of the shadow archetype.

The old mythology of the South is founded on sexuality and, ironically, on Puritanism. The American dream of the Puritan work ethic is ironically challenged by the personal projections of the self which are failures by that ethic yet succeed in terms of the plays. Alternately, those who succeed by the terms of the ethic are the shadow figures, who fail in terms of the play. The sexual figures of the South are also challenged: the virgin with her underlying passion; the lady with the sexual dominance of feminine vulnerability over husbands and sons; the spinster with her lack of sexual awareness. Tennessee Williams ironically challenges all these with a mythology of his own subconscious, strangely enough not based on sexuality. This mythology is compared with the old myth in modern situations and it is the ironical discrepancies between the two that cause the old myth to seem inadequate. It is thus by a form of irony that Tennessee Williams attempts to convey his ideas in dramatic presentation. My next chapter will pass on to examine that irony which can be found in the dramatic form of the plays themselves.



## CHAPTER II

### THE IRONIES OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' DRAMATIC FORM

This chapter will have as its subject of discussion the irony of dramatic form. The irony inherent in Tennessee Williams' theatrical presentation will be, for the purposes of this thesis, divided into three parts: first that found in the separation of the actor and the role; second that of the discrepancy between language and setting; third that created by the visual and oral techniques derived from other arts of painting, film, recitation and dancing, which are incorporated in the dramatic form employed by Tennessee Williams. The conclusion to this chapter will be an examination of the form of irony contained in the surface dramatic form (rather than the philosophy it expresses) of Williams' plays: namely the form of melodrama.

#### 1

The separation of the actor and the role is an irony of dramatic form which finds its ironical element in the incongruity of the discrepancy between the human actor and the non-human role. The role is an abstracted creation of the author which embodies part of the author's theme and which reveals that theme in an objective form to



the audience or reader.

The separation of the actor and the role is a technique which is not found in the plays of Williams alone. Pirandello, Brecht and Ionesco have all been aware of this separation as a problem and as a successful source for dramatic exploitation. In Six Characters in Search of an Author the actor and the role are entirely independent entities. The actor is his everyday self while the role is represented by a Character. The "Characters" of the play are simple representations of the fantastic: they exist outside of reality and can thus have their being only in relation to one another and can have that relationship reflected on the fantastic mask that each Character wears. Pirandello uses this separation of the actor and the role more as the content of this play than for dramatic technique. Brecht, on the other hand, uses the distinction between actor and role as a device which would alienate the audience from the illusion of a dramatic presentation. Nevertheless he maintains actor and role as one entity on the stage. This alienation effect makes the actors "pretend they're not pretending"<sup>1</sup>: they<sup>2</sup> were "playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play."<sup>3</sup> It would seem that Brecht is concerned with the intellectual appreciation of drama, and he unfortunately neglects the total response of the spectator which, ironically, requires both intellectual detachment





and emotional involvement. That same awareness of the separation of actor and role came to Eugene Ionesco when he attended the theatre for the first time, only to find the art an embarrassment--for it seemed all illusion and technique: "for me it was a kind of vulgar trick, transparent, inconceivable."<sup>4</sup> His answer to the problem of theatrical self-consciousness was that of making the devices of theatrical presentation more obvious to the audience and to "go all out for caricature and the grotesque."<sup>5</sup>

This theatrical self-consciousness is here narrowed down to its effect of separating the actor and the role. In the breakdown of theatrical ritual and of the process of Jungian individuation one may find the point when the actor and the role break apart. In Chapter I I stated that nowadays there did not seem to be, for the actor, a unification of the known and the feared: of the conscious and unconscious elements of his own personality. (Certainly there is not the identification of which Huizinga speaks:

When a certain form of religion accepts a sacred identity between two things of a different order, say a human being and an animal, this relationship is not adequately expressed by calling it a "symbolical correspondence" as we conceive this. The identity, the essential oneness of the two goes far deeper than the correspondence between a substance and its symbolic image. It is a mystical unity. The one has become the other.<sup>6</sup>

It could be surmised that the lack of mystic unity between actor and role occurs when the ritual or religion, external to the dramatic ac-



tion, has become meaningless. This could mean that the playwright is no longer effectively conquering the unknown fears of the community in the theatre because the myths or themes which are embodied within the role are too insignificant to contain all the audience's, and indeed the author's, fears.

Tennessee Williams finds his practical answer in a technique which incorporates those devices which also served as a practical answer for Brecht and later for Ionesco. The role and the actor are the one entity on the stage but they remain separate while Williams extends the former as far to the extremes of the monstrous, the grotesque and the caricature. If this was all he did one would have a combination of Brecht's alienation effect on the audience and Ionesco's absurdity: with the only outcome a bald statement of the dramatic problems. Williams incorporates, however, this technique of role extension into the total dramatic form. He brings emotional contact for the audience back into the drama, thus breaking the sense of complete intellectual detachment, by placing the role and the actor together: the former monstrous and grotesque, the latter human and mistaken in his folly. He uses this discrepancy between role and actor for ironical effect. In exploiting this situation for irony Williams is returning to a living dramatic form instead of remaining with dead dramatic statement.<sup>7</sup> He is using the modern dilemma of self-conscious drama





to reinforce a theatre, which is trying to maintain an emotional contact with the problems of the age, with a vigorous intellectual irony in the dramatic form. I will proceed to examine the role and actor separation by dividing the study into three parts: first the role as caricature; second the role as grotesque; and third the role as monstrous. I will define what I mean by the terms caricature, grotesque, and monstrous as I proceed.

An extension of the role into the realms of caricature causes Williams to employ exclusively one dominant feature of the role and to elaborate that feature consistently for that role. Thus he employs the animal figure for some male roles. The ape role for Stanley and Moony<sup>8</sup> is not simply a sexually animalistic figure, it is also a slavery figure: the ape is caged and trapped. In the early figure of Moony (1940) the caged quality is his own human weakness for womankind which leads to his Adam-like capitulation of his free spirit to woman and all that woman represents: responsibility and the material hamperings of society. In A Streetcar Named Desire the irony has become more subtle. Stanley is now trapped by his very animality. His wild outbursts and fits of temper should reveal, in his actions on the stage, an animal trying to escape from within the human actor. The reason for the escape is the frustrating fact that it is that sexual dominance (making this ape the king of his tribe) which in turn pre-



vents him from achieving success on higher planes of existence, such as those represented by Blanche in her finer speeches. The very fact that a woman like Blanche could only interest Stanley if she "lay"<sup>9</sup> with him, and also the fact that that same woman has the power to take another man, perhaps Mitch, to a different, and a possibly higher relationship proves Stanley's ineffectuality when out of his animal kingdom. The bull figure<sup>10</sup> calls forth a certain amount of concern, and even sympathy, from the audience for the frustrations besetting this role. Alvaro is clumsy and bear-like in his clownish behaviour, and here the foolish human actor is revealed through the role which is one "resembling a glossy young bull."<sup>11</sup> Archie Meighan has the same ironical structure of actor and role as Alvaro: he is a mad "steer," blind with fury, "wheeling," "panting," and "bellowing,"<sup>12</sup> yet he is a frustrated human being within those actions and is "staggering" and "sobbing."<sup>13</sup>

The exaggeration of role is an extension of it into theatricality and the grotesque. As a result a fantastic property of the stage, such as the mask, is employed to intensify the grotesque element in the role. Williams uses the oxygen mask with the role of the Princess Kosmonopolis<sup>14</sup> as an exotic projection into theatricality: "No, no you just look exotic, like a Princess from Mars or a big insect."<sup>15</sup> The fact that literally below the surface of the insect mask there is





a fragile human being lost in her exotic image and fading with it into oblivion makes the ironical link between the human actor and the dramatic role.

The element of the monstrous, the exaggeration of one human quality of a role so that that quality dominates it, thus making it inhumanly extended and unbalanced, is a device used by Williams to enhance the theatrical and the fantastic in Sweet Bird of Youth; to strengthen the dramatic force of the character Maggie in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; and to infuriate one, myself particularly, to hysteria pitch with the situations revolving around Laura in The Glass Menagerie.

The roles of the Princess and Chance Wayne are theatrical because the theatre is their business; they are monstrous because unclean prostituted figures of inhumanity are the results of failure in that business as Williams conceives them in Sweet Bird of Youth. The human actor is the element of the past before the present of both roles which is depicted on the stage. He should be considered as young, uncorrupted humanity. The irony of the Corporate actor-role figure, or character, is that there can be no return for him to the past humanity: the monster is now the entire outward figure and the human being is encased within it. In these two now inhuman figures: "monster meets monster, and one monster has to give way."<sup>16</sup>





The self-awareness of monstrosity in the Princess gives her the all-knowing quality which belongs to the anima figure. Her wisdom of experience is that which makes her know that she and Chance are both "lost in beanstalk country, the ogre's country," and it is in that country that they must live--for normal time and normal youth are past humanity: monstrous time is safer for monsters to live by. It is because Chance will not accept the advice of the anima that he is killed by "the enemy, time"<sup>17</sup> the moment he returns to the 'normal' world.

"Maggie the Cat"<sup>18</sup> is a cat-like monster because bitterness and sarcasm are her monstrous features: Maggie has become a monster because of her need to protect herself in a house of monsters. The illusion and the lying about Big Daddy's health and life, the edifice of cruel illusions and lies built around that lie and, larger still, Brick's escapism from a world which he thinks is created from lies, when in actuality even that escape and the basic facts for it are lies within Brick himself: all this culminates to make the plantation on the Mississippi delta a nightmare world. The "no-neck monsters"<sup>19</sup> terrorize the characters in the play with cruel and insensitive childish pranks in a similar way to the monstrously grotesque and unfeeling behaviour of the family Fahrenkopf in The Night of the Iguana; Mae, who produces so many children that even their grandfather has lost count, is a "monster of fertility"<sup>20</sup>; and finally Maggie herself has undergone



"this---hideous! --transformation, become hard! Frantic!"<sup>21</sup>

The heavily drawn characters of Mae and her children remain monstrous but Maggie gains a poignant irony through the revelation of a human actor within the cat-like role. This warm and gentle mother figure has taken the role of a liar and a monster (who murders for the sake of truth: "Who shot cock-robin? I with my merciful - arrow!"<sup>22</sup>) until finally her human qualities below the role are revealed when she makes love gently to a man who does not love her: ironically, she does this in order to make a lie come true and in order to verify her own love.

Laura appears to be monstrous also. As a figure of the Southern virgin she is a freak; she is also inhumanly fragile. The neurosis which causes her to fall ill at business college, and that which strikes her before she meets her gentleman caller make her infuriating to her mother. The human actor below the glass virgin cannot exist except for the ironical moment when the glass is shattered. At this moment Laura becomes human--only to have her humanity also shattered by the revelation of a "steady" belonging to her gentleman caller. Thereafter the inhuman candle glow of the beanstalk country returns and she becomes fragile again. The monstrous Laura recurs only to haunt her brother with her candlelight.

The separation between actor and role causes the audience to ex-





perience irony when they intellectually perceive the human actor behind the role, for then he, who is mentally understood, is compared with the role presented on the stage to the physical senses of sight and hearing. I have divided the comparisons of role and actor into three: first the role as caricature, which is presented as an animal and which is compared with its opposite, the human frailty of limitation; second the role as a theatrical extension--such as the mask, with the human actor trapped beneath the mask and proving even more frail and impermanent than a creation of the unreal theatre--the mask itself; third the role as a theatrical extension beyond the mask, for now the mask of the dead theatre is a living part of the monstrous creation of theatrical situations, the ogre-role. This despicable monster is compared with the more admirable, yet less lasting and dying, human being encased within the role.

## 2

The problem of a certain amount of incongruity arising between the language and the setting occurs for a playwright like Tennessee Williams, who moves in the realms of the mind and of fantasy, because of the effects of naturalism and realism on the theatre. If the only language that an audience finds acceptable is that of everyday speech then Williams has to incorporate that comprehensible language in a new and a more poetic form.



In the early one-act plays, The American Blues (copyright 1940), one finds experimentation with this language problem in such plays as The Dark Room and The Case of the Crushed Petunias. The latter is a "lyrical fantasy"<sup>23</sup> and the language is somewhat stilted in syntax, for Miss Simple is a refined spinster and her visitor an angelic being. The tone of "Our animosity and its resultant action is best explained by a poem I once composed on the subject of petunias--and similar flora"<sup>24</sup> is quaint and fitting for this delightful one-act play. He would not, however, sustain the action of a full-length play. The Dark Room is an experiment with semantic problems. The spinster schoolteacher's words are incomprehensible to the "swarthy Italian"<sup>25</sup> woman whom she is interviewing. The literary words used by the social worker have a colloquial echo when the other woman speaks.<sup>26</sup> Finally the semantic problems form such a barrier between the two women that Miss Morgan's question, "you feel that her disappointment over this boy is what caused her to have this depressed mental state?"<sup>27</sup> is incomprehensible to Mrs. Pociotti, who has to tell her interviewer that "you speak funny things. I don't think. I try, but I don't make out."<sup>28</sup> The semantic problem is exploited in this play for a dramatic frustration of the audience, yet there is little clarity of theme evident through all the frustrations of the language. When Williams turned to a larger fantasy in 1948 he avoided the semantic ironies and found a new solution to the





language problem by using a highly poetic foreign language with which to punctuate realistic colloquial speech. In Camino Real Italian was the language he chose and it even allows him to use English more poetically, more enigmatically, at the conclusion of the play: "the violets in the mountains are breaking the rocks."<sup>29</sup>

The plays produced in the same year as Camino Real are A Streetcar Named Desire and Summer and Smoke. The roles of Blanche in the former, and Alma in the latter, are almost identical, though Blanche is a later version of Alma (i.e., Alma at a late stage of development). The language which both speak is exactly the same and contains a poetry of expression and a stately tone not unlike that of Miss Simple or Miss Morgan. The difference, however, between The Case of the Crushed Petunias and The Dark Room compared with A Streetcar Named Desire is that in the latter semantic irony has become a device to aid the formal structure of the play. It is not a "dramatic" irony for the spectator is not conscious of a situation of which the characters are unaware; rather it is a "semantic" irony or the clashing of two incongruous language forms, that of the colloquial and the vulgar and that of the affected and refined. The irony does not stop at language but, with the aid of the incongruous clash, augments another irony of situation and setting. Blanche's affected language and highly fantastic appearance are out of place in the New Orleans slum but they are suited to one half of her schizophrenic





personality and the ambitions of that half: the Southern gentlewoman. The irony of her language is revealed when her baser half (in actuality she is almost a prostitute) becomes apparent. The setting of the play and the prostitute side of her nature form an ironical relationship with the language she uses and her image of herself as the Southern gentlewoman. In this manner Williams can introduce a poetic form of language which suits the fantasy of the setting of the play<sup>30</sup> and then proceed to elaborate the ironies created by both language and setting.

It was yet later in 1957-1958 while undergoing psychoanalysis that Williams wrote his "moral fable of our times"<sup>31</sup> Suddenly Last Summer. Suddenly Last Summer is one of Williams' best structured plays. In this play the setting reinforces the semantic irony of the incongruous relationships of concepts recurring throughout the work and thus, even more tightly than in A Streetcar Named Desire, the language and setting are working together for ironical effect. Incongruity is the concern of the ironist for via it, as Turner says, the theme is revealed:

The ironist. . . places ridiculous things amongst the dignified, bad amongst the good, and false amongst the true, so that their ridiculousness, badness and falseness may become obvious to all sensible people. But he does not explain that this is what he is doing; it is not necessary, and it might spoil the sudden clarity that he hopes to awaken in our minds by means of these juxtapositions.<sup>32</sup>

The central irony of Suddenly Last Summer is that of the juxtaposition of the concepts of religion and perversion. There are three other major ironical relationships of concepts linked with that central



incongruity: first those of birth and death-by-eating which is linked by sacrifice and communion with religion; second those Lawrencian concepts of victim and victimizer which are linked to religion by the spiritual and material poverty of the victim; third that of Catherine's madness, which is truth, and which is linked through truth to religion.

The religion of Mrs. Venable is that of a "reasonably loyal member of the Protestant Episcopal Church"<sup>33</sup>; she nevertheless is able, together with her son, to understand the cruel perversion of the Christian God: the God of the Encantadas. Mrs. Venable is also insistent about her religious attitude of devotion to her son's holy occupation as a poet, to his celibacy<sup>34</sup> and to his fasting,<sup>35</sup> and yet she is desperate to bribe a doctor to destroy her niece's mind in the most cruel manner, lacking in any religious feeling. The absurd, yet gruesome, irony of this witch-like figure, and of her religious beliefs, is reflected in her sweet remark of a cigarette-lighter flame: "so shines a good deed in a naughty world."<sup>36</sup> This incongruous understatement of the cruel world, as she has seen it at the Galapagos Islands, sums up the perversion of her religious outlook.

Sebastian Venable, martyr, is to be compared with Saint Sebastian of third century Italy. The early Christian mosaic of an old bearded San Sebastian became transformed by the Renaissance into a beautiful naked young man shot with arrows by vicious enemies of





his religion. The early Renaissance has the naked and bleeding body of the martyr as the focal point of the picture; there is a lingering sensuality about the tormented flesh which is punctured and dribbling blood. It was D. H. Lawrence, of whom Williams is a devotee,<sup>37</sup> who said:

There is, I think, [a] strain of cold dislike or self-dislike, through much of the Renaissance art, and through all the later Shakespeare . . . it is a kind of corruption in the flesh and a conscious revolt from this.<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in light of the above quotation, it is Saint Sebastian who is punished in the flesh while such painters as Antonio Polaiulo and Antonello da Messina glory in the beauty of the flesh of his martyred body. The Sebastian of Williams has an image "of himself as a sort of! - sacrifice to a! - terrible sort of - sort of a -" " - God?" "Yes, a - cruel one."<sup>39</sup> He has the same perverted and ironical duality as the Renaissance paintings of San Sebastian, that of a sacrifice of his flesh to cruel religion while pursuing the flesh and its corruption.

Part of the concept of a cruel god stems from the next ironical relationship, that of the imagery of birth and death. A martyr is, of course, born to die and the god of martyrs creates everything in his universe with that destruction in mind. Thus Sebastian saw his God in the fate of the turtles of Encantadas or the Galapagos Islands: turtles which were devoured by the flesh-eating birds immediately



after they were born. The imagery of this birth-death concept is one which has the appearance of the "metaphysical shudder"<sup>40</sup> for it combines death, sex and birth in one image. The link between these three activities is through the imagery of devouring. Catherine's lover devoured her with "his hot ravenous mouth"<sup>41</sup> and Sebastian speaks of those with whom he wishes to have sexual relations as if they are items on a menu: "Cousin Sebastian said he was famished for blonds."<sup>42</sup> The tables are finally turned on Sebastian when those "dark ones," with whom he has had sexual relations, kill and devour him. The imagery of this murder is ironically reminiscent of that scene when the birds killed and ate the turtles: "Sebastian started to run and they all screamed at once and seemed to fly in the air, they outran him so quickly."<sup>43</sup> The birth-death irony is found also in Sebastian's work as a poet. This impotent man does have moments of bringing forth when he can struggle and give birth to a poem, even though the poems seem to have little life themselves. The mother-son relationship becomes crucial at this point for after the nine months pregnancy throughout the year, the three months of the summer were those of labour and birth for his poems. The birth would be difficult and the delivery impossible without the mother's presence. Ironically the mother-son relationship is seen through the eyes of the mother and the ties between her and her son hold the son from self-





destruction. The imagery used to describe Sebastian's step to self-sacrifice is that of a symbolic birth: "something had broken, that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like a - sort of a - sort of umbilical cord - -." (Mrs. Venable -) "She means that I held him back from - . . . destruction!"<sup>44</sup> Thus the delivery of the brain child was impossible for Sebastian without his mother's presence and in turn his own destruction was certain from the moment he was symbolically born by being absent from her. The cruel god now sends the birds to eat the turtle or the sacrifice. The cruel mother, incongruous and dominant, is replaced by the God himself and Sebastian is faced with the ironical situation of being born to die.

The religion in which Sebastian believes is one of an acceptance of the position placed upon one by the cruel God of the Encantadas. One is either the flesh-eating bird or the soft bellied turtle: either the victim or the victimizer. Ironically enough, Sebastian, the young boys, Mrs. Venable, and even the doctor do not remain either the one or the other, they change positions from victim and victimizer to the opposite role. Sebastian is the victimizer of the young boys and they are his victims, but finally Sebastian is the victim and they the victimizers. The situation is exactly that described by D. H. Lawrence:

The Church in helping men. . . pushes them more and more into a soft, emotional helplessness, with the unpleasant sensuous gratification of feeling themselves victims, victimized, victimized, but the same time with the lurking sardonic consciousness that in the end





a victim is stronger than the victimizer. In the end, the victims pull down their victimizer, like a pack of hyenas on an unwary lion. They know it.<sup>45</sup>

Mrs. Venable thinks that she is the victim of Catherine's malicious ego<sup>46</sup> but in fact she is trying to destroy Catherine's sanity and is the victimizer. Even the doctor begins as a victimizer of Catherine, only to become a victim, together with his fiancé and his hospital,<sup>47</sup> to her truth. The ultimate victimizers are the poor and the unprotected, the young boys and Catherine, but below that material, and apparently mental poverty, there lies the strength of the victim: "Cursed are the falsely meek, for they are inheriting the earth."<sup>48</sup>

The fact that Catherine is telling the truth is the final irony of the semantic structure of the play--for she is considered insane. Yet it is only Catherine who understands and has the strength to face the God of Cabeza de Lobo; she, in her turn, is the victim of the cruel God and she accepts it, unlike Sebastian who tried to take on the role of that God and made his final mistake by attempting to change the situation.<sup>49</sup> Catherine, then, faces that God in the form of the truth about Sebastian's death "I can't change truth. I'm not God! I'm not even sure that He could, I don't think God can change truth."<sup>50</sup> Catherine's truth, unbelievable and insane as it is, is the ultimate and only sanity for her.

Irony develops in the plot as the transformation takes place from



victims to victimizers. As Catherine progresses in her story the previous hints of irony are revealed: Sebastian's concept of the cruel god of the Encantadas is perceived more and more as the facts of the action at Cabeza de Lobo are told. The theme of devouring begins with the depiction of the Venus flytrap in Sebastian's jungle garden, on stage at the outset of the play, and it continues, with ironical links with religion, sexual relationships and death, until the final speech. The animals which feed the flytrap are fruit flies used for "experimental genetics," and this theme of birth is re-introduced two pages later with the subject of the pregnancy of a poetic creation and continues with many images of birth until Scene Four. The play has a verbal unit which is the result of the ironical use of language to weave themes, imagery and setting into an organic whole.

The early language experiments show that Williams was aware of the problem of an incongruity arising between his setting and his language for a play. The language and setting have drawn closer together in his work until the semantic and dramatic ironies of language coincide with ironies of action and character. Thus from The Dark Room and The Case of the Crushed Petunias to Suddenly Last Summer we see the use of language developing and its ironies increasingly aiding the formal structure of the plays.





The technique of incorporating painting, music, recitation and film in drama has developed from the inherent qualities of the simultaneously visual and aural nature of the theatre. The exploitation of this technique is of the Wagnerian tradition:

Since Richard Wagner's ambition to restore the Greek tragic poet's concept of drama in "total theatre," such "total theatre" has been exalted as the shrine sacred to the melting, the marriage, the fusion of all the arts. I do not deny that this point of view has its legitimacy and its grandeur. It is a fact that theatre alone can at one and the same time delight eye and ear and heart in a balanced harmony of plastic movement music and poetry.<sup>51</sup>

The attitude fostered by Williams and his teacher John Gassner would lead one to believe that this total drama, or integration of all the arts, is part of the natural genius of an unsophisticated Southerner:

He felt the need for expression that he could not satisfy with anything less than the full visual and aural compliment of the theatrical arts . . . Williams was certain that his metier was the theatre because he found himself continually thinking in terms of sound, colour and stage movement. . . . "The turbulent business of my nerves," he declared, "demanded something more animate than written language could be."<sup>52</sup>

Whether this form of theatrical presentation came naturally to Williams is a dubious point--surely the effect of the "noted German director of 'epic theatre,' Erwin Piscator,"<sup>53</sup> who, together with John Gassner, instructed Williams in the art of drama at the New School for Social Research, was such that Williams found himself writing a form of theatre which was in the German tradition of Wagner and Brecht.



Williams manages to use the techniques learnt from that German tradition for an exactly opposite effect to Brecht's "alienation effect"<sup>54</sup>: he uses the other arts to enhance the illusion of drama, not to shatter it. This effect creates a 'dramatic irony' in which the detached spectator in the audience is aware of the techniques of the film scene, the drawing and the music to which the actor is oblivious.

Erwin Piscator was working with Brecht while he was experimenting with "epic theatre." It was by Piscator's stage effects that Brecht felt the modern methods of theatrical presentation come to life: "the modern stage made itself felt among us, Piscator. . . began to transform its scenic potentialities."<sup>55</sup> To add a further dimension to the stage and to remind the audience that this was indeed theatrical illusion Piscator introduced films and cartoons into the set; he was the "first person to make use of records;"<sup>56</sup> and he hung "reversible flags bearing inscriptions"<sup>57</sup> on stage. These devices of reminding the audience that they were present in a theatre were for Brecht alienation effects; for Williams, who projects legends or headlines, images, and film onto the set; who makes use of various kinds of background music; introduces the flags and screens bearing symbolic devices; and also avails himself of the dance: they have the dual and ironical purpose of reminding the audience of their detachment





while also involving them further in the illusionary effects of the theatre.

The technique of legend projection has this dual purpose, for the legend itself alienates the audience by its form by reminding them of their presence in the theatre, but the content of the device aids the audience to accept the illusion of the stage and to identify with a character, such as Laura when her inner states are projected as legends. Laura becomes the focal point of the content of the legends when the gentleman caller arrives.<sup>58</sup> As Laura is reticent about her emotional responses these are revealed and made more distinct by the legends. The reaction to the "gay deceivers," about which her mother is so flippant, is outlined by the legend "The Pretty Trap" and outlined also is the ironical conflict between mother and daughter in which the daughter seems more mature and less exhibitionist than the mother. However sincere her reaction, it is an exaggeration by Laura of the situation. The effect of this exaggeration and such legends as "Terror" and "The Opening of a Door" causes the device to draw the play closer to the form of melodrama. Thus the legends exaggerate the situation just as the melodramatic Southern temperament exaggerates the situation. The legends make the form more melodramatic while revealing (together with the figure of the chorus--Tom) to the audience the figure of the





omniscient author as he is laughing at Amanda and Laura, despite his awareness of their plight.

Williams' use of music and of other sound effects is of three different kinds, each of which coincides with three different forms or spheres of attention. In the central sphere of attention the audience is entirely aware of the musical effect which is a part of the action of the play. The second sphere is that in which the music heightens the emotional effect, consciously or unconsciously, and is explained by the setting of the play, while being background music. The third and final sphere is that of subconscious attention to sound effects and music which heighten concentration on the content of the play. This latter form of music or of sounds is entirely background and occurs only when the mood of the content of the play requires it.

The device of using music on the set, which action falls to the central sphere of attention, can be used for dramatic irony. Music is used thus in A Streetcar Named Desire. In this play the irony is aided by Blanche's habit of bathing frequently to release tension. This action of departing to the bathroom physically separates her from the other characters in the living room and thus enables two unrelated actions, of speaking and singing, to take place at the same time. Scene Seven combines the off-stage music of Blanche's singing which is balanced "contrapuntally with Stanley's speech."<sup>59</sup> The



dramatic irony of the whole scene revolves around the audience's awareness of this contrapuntal rhythm and timing. Blanche sings the lines of a romantic "sacchariné" ballad, "Paper Moon," the theme of which is the need for illusion in romance as summed up by the refrain "it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me." Counter to these lines Stanley is dissolving all Blanche's illusion of nobility by telling the truth about her promiscuous past. The audience here become aware of an irony of situation to which Blanche is oblivious.

The music of the "hot trumpet" and the "blue piano" are incorporated realistically into the set by the existence of the New Orleans night club and cafe at the corner of the street. The adjectives affixed to both instruments suggest the manner in which they are employed, namely to heighten the emotional key at certain points. In this way the tension is relaxed as the awareness of the emotion enters the second sphere of attention by becoming, together with the music, less obvious to the audience and yet the tension is also heightened since this awareness creates more involvement in the technique of theatrical presentation of emotion--or the illusion of theatre.

The third form of music in this play is that of tunes and particular melodies remembered. "The Varsouviana" is heard when Blanche is reminded of her marriage by Stanley<sup>60</sup> even before the audience is





aware of the significance of the melody. At the times when this music sounds the words spoken and reactions shown should be of such import that the music has an almost subconscious effect of heightening attention in the audience. The music of memory and Blanche's illusions become the opposite of their original nature: memory music becomes music in actuality and illusion becomes reality. As this happens the audience's awareness becomes more centered on the music. "The Varsouviana" sounds for the subconscious of the audience when Blanche tells Mitch of her first husband's suicide and it ceases when she finds "God"<sup>61</sup> in Mitch's arms. When, however, Mitch deserts Blanche "The Varsouviana" rings in her ears, and possibly, the audience's, as if sounding from within the set itself.<sup>62</sup> Now all the illusions of Blanche's schizophrenia have been removed but the illusions have denied their own destruction and have become actuality. "The Varsouviana" sounds for the audience's central sphere of attention rather than in the formerly subconscious sphere.

This "memory" music reappears in Sweet Bird of Youth as "the lament." Its melody blends with a conscious noise, the sound effect of the "wind-blown sound of palms,"<sup>63</sup> and it is an unrealistic device reinforcing the emotional pitch of mourning for lost youth. The effect of the device works on the subconscious of the audience to exaggerate the irony of actor and role separation, of a separation between the



monster and the human elements in *Chance and the Princess*, by lamenting lost youth and lost humanity.

All three levels of attention and the corresponding aural techniques are involved in the play Suddenly Last Summer. The first two musical sounds are ironically juxtaposed to augment the irony of the theme. The ominous yet realistic bird cries of the jungle garden on the set and the remembered wild cries of the birds at Galapagos, together with the remembered sound of the percussion instruments of the bands of vagabonds at Cabeza da Lobo, lead the audience to make the logical association between the two and to conclude that the setting of Sebastian's garden is as wild and murderous as that of the Galapagos Islands and that Catherine's lobotomy, in that same setting, is as vicious as the murder of Sebastian at Cabeza da Lobo. (Whether there is a link suggested by the name pun is difficult to tell; it could just be coincidental.)

The third sound of music is used specifically for irony and should be central in the sphere of attention of the audience: it is the "lyrical" music and similar light sounds, such as the single bird song. The "sudden sweet smile" of Mrs. Venable is accompanied by "a bird sings sweetly in the garden"<sup>64</sup> and this same bird sings "clear and sweet" as Catherine is about to tell of the cruelties of "last summer." The sound is the opposite of that which is expected, for it accompanies an





ominous happening incongruously, and thus it jars the audience into attentive awareness.

These three methods of using accompanying music and sound effects are both realistic and unrealistic. They are explained by creating the place of origin as on the set or just off it but they are timed to suit the emotional pitch the author wishes to produce. The "memory" music is the most effective yet unrealistic method of this device for, to an audience used to films with background music, the sound can become subconsciously accepted, or, when it is positioned wrongly, it can become ironical.

I have placed the technique of film as the heading for projections of still images, moving pictures and a technique of a visual nature in which one major action or situation in the play is mirrored by a minor moment, the import of which the audience finds obvious through the visual 'reflection.'

The 'reflection' technique is used to heighten a moment in the play in which the ironies of the whole action can be clarified. The reflection is caused by the repetition of the theme by an action in a moment of silence. The confrontation between Catherine and the doctor in which the doctor has to decide whether the lobotomy should be performed, and thus whether Catherine should remain sane or not, is reflected at the end of Scene One. Catherine appears clearly at the win-





dow and stares at the doctor for some length of time while Mrs. Venable is speaking and for a period of silence: "the young doctor stares at Catherine framed by the lace window curtain Sister Felicity appears beside her and draws her away."<sup>65</sup> The future conflict with Catherine and the doctor's responsibility for her are condensed into the action of this confrontation through the window and into that of the representative of the establishment, Sister Felicity, removing Catherine from the normal public eye. This same technique is used at the beginning of Scene Three of A Streetcar Named Desire. The animality of the young poker players is accentuated by the use of a scene resembling "a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard parlor at night."<sup>66</sup> It could be further accentuated by the hanging of that picture on the set, above the scene resembling it (although it would be rather out of character for either Stella or Stanley to have such a work of art).

The kitchen now suggests that sort of livid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colours of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players--Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo wear coloured shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colours.<sup>67</sup>

"The absorbed silence" required at this moment cuts down the movement of the actors apart from the card-dealer and creates a tableau, capturing or reflecting the theme of the men's animality and, in turn, their ironical confrontation with the animal/spirit dichotomy in the



schizophrenic Blanche.

The technique of incorporating film into the stage set is an unrealistic extension of the above "reflector" technique. The device develops from being contained entirely within the action of the play (as above) to an obvious technique of using film for reflection of off-stage activity (in Sweet Bird of Youth) and to an external technical device having an ironical effect, such as the films used in The Glass Menagerie.

Boss Finley's political rally takes place in the hall off-stage in Act Two, Scene Two of Sweet Bird of Youth but the action is projected onto a film screen, representing a television on the stage:

Stuff makes a gesture as if to turn on the T.V., which we play in the fourth wall. A wavering beam of light, flickering, narrow, intense, comes from the balcony rail. Stuff moves his head so that he's in it, looking into it. . . . Chance walks slowly downstage, his head also in the narrow flickering beam of light. As he walks downstage, there suddenly appears on the big T.V. screen, which is the whole back wall of the stage, the image of Boss Finley.<sup>68</sup>

The moment of confrontation, which Chance must accept, between himself, Heavenly and her male relations is captured for a moment in the silence preceding the sound "which always follows the picture by an instant."<sup>69</sup> In this technique we have the irony of the actuality of the monstrosity of the characters on stage, in the forms of the figures of Chance and Boss Finley's mistress Miss Lucy, who both know that that captured in an art form: namely the film of the public po-





litical speech, is nothing but lies and propaganda and that these people on the film--the uncorrupt noble Southerner and his pure virgin daughter, are nothing but shams.

Laura's freakish and old-fashioned virginity is captured by an art form and projected on film as an "image of blue roses":

Other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk over the earth. You just stay here. They're common as weeds, but you--well, you're Blue Roses!

(Image on Screen: Blue Roses.)

L: But blue is wrong for - roses. . .

J: It's right for you!<sup>70</sup>

The ironical fact is that Laura is unique and alone, even "wrong" and false, and will remain so because she is the myth of the Southern virgin come true. The film projection of other images in this play has the same foundation as the legends which exaggerate the action. Images such as the "Young Man at Door with Flowers,"<sup>71</sup> which represents the gentleman caller, and "Sailing Vessel with Jolly Roger,"<sup>72</sup> which typifies Tom's romantic attitude toward adventure, are the customary sentimental images of such situations in a melodramatic mind. They are the absurdities of a middle class dream in the romantic Hollywood style; they are the material irony is made of--"the solemn parading [of] absurdities before our eyes."<sup>73</sup>

The visual ironies of role conflicts are aided by the use of the fantastic in Suddenly Last Summer. The unrealistic setting of the play



is "the decor of dramatic ballet." Ballet depends on immediate visual perception of roles and of relationships of roles for its effect, and the techniques of ballet have the same effect when they are incorporated as the free spirit Carol Cutrere in Orpheus Descending:

She is past thirty and, lacking prettiness, she has an odd fugitive beauty which is stressed almost to the point of fantasy by a style of makeup with which a dancer named Valli has lately made such an impression in the Bohemian centres of France and Italy, the face and lips powdered white and the eyes outlined and exaggerated with black pencil and the lids tinted blue.<sup>74</sup>

The key word here is 'fugitive' for, like the figure of Val, 'Orpheus' in the play, Carol is one of the "fugitive kind"<sup>75</sup> who break down the outdated and unchanging laws of society "like a fox in a chicken coop."<sup>76</sup> She adds the element of wildness and fantasy to the neatly ordered small community and creates anarchy there.

The use of dance also finds its irony in accentuating the relationship of the roles and in the part that relationship plays in the entire action. Thus, in Suddenly Last Summer the conflict between the established authority of Sister Felicity and the rebellious Catherine is a microcosm of the plot where Mrs. Venable is attempting to impose an authority on Catherine to make sure that she ceases to "babble" or even to exist. The interaction of the dance of Catherine and Sister Felicity occurs in Scene Two:

The following, quick cadenced lines are accompanied by quick, dance-like movements, almost formal, as the Sister in her sweeping white habit, which should be starched to make a crackling sound pursues the





girl about the white wicker patio table and among the chairs: this can be accompanied by quick music.<sup>77</sup>

The final visual technique Williams uses communicates in a concise manner an irony central to the action of the play in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More. The reversible flags, which Piscator used, emphasise the ironic nature of the central figure of the play: the monstrous, yet dying and therefore human, Mrs. Goforth. The stage hands are speaking: "1. 'The device on the banner is a golden griffin.' 2. 'A mythological monster, half lion and half eagle.' 1. 'And completely human.'"<sup>78</sup> The golden griffin is Mrs. Goforth's "heraldic device."<sup>79</sup> It is a concise statement of emotional significance and yet it is far from the melodramatic legends of The Glass Menagerie. Instead of exaggerating a situation it catches the irony of that situation in an abstract and grotesque symbolism which calls forth little emotional response from the audience.

#### 4.

Tennessee Williams' psychiatrist, in 1957, told him that he wrote "cheap melodramas and nothing else."<sup>80</sup> The psychiatrist misunderstood much of the meaning of Tennessee Williams' plays while showing acute perception of their form. The concept of melodrama which I have in mind when referring to Williams' dramatic form is that form which evokes an emotional, even sentimental, response





from the audience because of the techniques of both characterization and theatrical device. My intention is not to condemn such a form but to explain its exploitation for ironic effect. Williams is able to communicate his theme by eliciting an emotional audience response to the stock characters and situations of sentimental drama and by challenging that response with his own concept of a hostile reality. The audience is confronted by the ironical clash between their emotional response to the characterization or form of the plays and their intellectual perception of the opposing theme. That melodrama is an ironical form is illustrated by Turner: "the ironist attempts to convict the foolish of their folly by appearing to accept the logical deductions arising from it, and by solemnly parading absurdities before our eyes."<sup>81</sup> The absurdities of the typical figures of the old mythology such as were examined in Chapter I; the grotesqueness of the human type when his role is extended into the animalesque and the monstrous; the heightening of both these by techniques such as musical accompaniment, which should further stress the irony of the extensions of the role and of the emotional response: these are all presented seriously, on the surface, yet what is presented is the folly of these forms extended to its logical figures and roles.

These figures, roles and their relationships are found in the sentimental clichés of such figures as the faithful and suffering wife--



Serafina in The Rose Tattoo; family life and its continuation through the younger generations in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; the American dream of the "work equals success" formula in Sweet Bird of Youth; the mother-son relationship in Suddenly Last Summer; and the Southern virgin in A Streetcar Named Desire and The Glass Menagerie. All these sentimental relationships are revealed as shams by their confrontation with the hostile reality of the author's own vision. That reality destroys mercilessly, in the content of the play, the old sentimental clichés embodied in the form of the play. The reality which destroys is the author's own philosophy which will be examined, together with the irony surrounding its incorporation in the plays and the changes it has undergone because of the plays, in the following chapter.





### CHAPTER III

#### THE IRONICAL CHANGE OF PHILOSOPHY AND IRONIES FOUND IN THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

This final chapter concentrates on the ironies to be found in both Williams' philosophies, the earlier and the later, and in the dramatic presentations of them. I shall begin by examining the early philosophy and its ironical reversal in dramatic presentation. I shall then proceed to study the forms of irony in the later philosophy, which develops from this ironical reversal of the earlier philosophy when dramatically presented. Finally, I shall conclude by looking at the effect of the later philosophy on the more recent of Tennessee Williams' dramas, and the further ironical development of dramatic form--a dramatic form which has thus passed beyond the ironies of mythology<sup>1</sup> of the earlier characters and has developed beyond the earlier melodramatic theatrical presentation.<sup>2</sup>

"Among people I know, it is usually the idealists who are the most tough-minded and down to earth"<sup>3</sup>: these words are most apt when they are applied to Tennessee Williams' <sup>early</sup> philosophy, which is both idealistic and pessimistic, and the respective method of dramatic presentation, which is pessimistic on the surface but through irony, such as that examined in Chapter I, is idealistic in import. In his



foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth Williams explains his position that, in his view, man in his present state of development is guilt-ridden, envious, anxious, angry, weak, and brutal. Williams has, however, an optimism which has yet to be justified, an optimism concerning his idea of the future--"the perhaps."<sup>4</sup> He expresses this hope thus: "I would say that there is something much bigger in life and death than we have become aware of (or adequately recorded) in our living and dying."<sup>5</sup> In this statement we find the clue to Blanche's tenacious optimism for mankind, to Shannon's reason for endurance, to the martyrdom of Val and Chance (and, paradoxically Sebastian), and to the apocalyptic figure of Chris Flanders. Man can and should hope for something better in human nature to develop in the future, but ironically in this present situation he has to capitulate, to die, to sacrifice himself and to endure, because of the hostile character of his own nature. Thus, ironically, that which is madness and illusion for Blanche, that which has caused failure for Chance and Val, that which was illusion and had to be endured as illusion for Shannon is reality and truth for their creator, Williams.

In the process of dramatic presentation, Williams' romanticism, which lies in the tenacious optimism that man can hope to improve or find something noble to live for in "the perhaps," is reversed into an illusionary belief, and the world in which this illusion exists is chal-





lenged by the outside hostile reality and faced by the character who once possessed optimism. To make this ironical reversal of the philosophy in dramatic presentation even more complex, the world in which the hostile reality is faced is in fact a world of fantasy--a world of the theatre. In fantasy the character attempts to come to terms with reality: this is the irony of Williams' form of dramatic presentation and it concerns the nature of his art of theatre.

The nature of the art of theatre is an irony within itself:

In the minds of the playwright, director, actor and audience, (all must operate to make a play), the drama is perceived by the senses and felt in the emotions as art, that is, as reality or "nature" heightened by beauty by human means. This is a mixed, complicated, even somewhat sophisticated perceptive state or mood. It is a mood we call "ironic," because of its simultaneous perception of the two concepts "art" and nature as at the same time contradictory and harmonious, untrue and true.<sup>6</sup>

The process whereby "nature," as used in the above quotation, is heightened by the artistic selectivity of certain elements from the "reality" external to the play, and whereby those elements are combined to present dramatically the ironical incongruity of the "true/untrue" final product, is the ironical action which is most fittingly studied with Tennessee Williams in mind. Williams' presentation of his optimistic hope that there is something bigger for mankind than has yet been found is reversed by these "ironic" and selective processes of theatrical art.<sup>7</sup> This form of irony is one in which the action in theatrical fantasy reveals the reality of Williams' philosophy.





Thus, in more practical terms, the irony is found in this dramatic presentation: in a fantasy world created by the artistic process the characters face a reality which is Williams' pessimistic concept of the present, and which produces in turn a new concept of reality for the characters that is in accordance with Williams' philosophy of hope. As to whether this new concept is any more valid than the original reality of the character before that character entered the fantasy is a problem which Williams himself has to face, and my conclusion to this chapter will attempt to discuss that problem.

The dramatic presentation in which an old reality is confronted by a new reality, this confrontation taking place in the realms of fantasy, can be posited as the predominant irony in many of Williams' plays. It can be found as the action of Summer and Smoke and A Streetcar Named Desire, Sweet Bird of Youth, The Glass Menagerie, Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, The Rose Tattoo, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Night of the Iguana, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More. The central paradox of these plays then is that by entering the fantasy world the realities of a previous world are challenged and proved invalid;<sup>8</sup> yet in terms of Williams' philosophy these realities are found valid, and are challenged by a new pessimistic "reality" which is, in turn, also valid as a reality for the author.

I will limit myself to discussing four plays: A Streetcar Named



Desire, The Rose Tattoo, The Night of the Iguana, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More. "All play creates a world within a world, a territory with laws of its own--and the theatre might be regarded as the most durable of the many magic palaces which infantile humanity has built"<sup>9</sup>: the "world within a world" in A Streetcar Named Desire is the palace of Elysian Fields.

These fields are one of "the great regions of the underworld,"<sup>10</sup> and Blanche enters it after leaving the exalted previous reality of "Belle Reve" which, by its very title, is shown to have been illusion. This world of fantasy, consisting of bright colours of physical animality, the paper lantern of deception, the music of the 'blue' piano and the 'hot' trumpet--all that Blanche equates with the world of Edgar Allan Poe--is the place where Blanche's illusionary reality is shattered by the challenge of the pessimistic reality of animal men like Stanley. And it is where that previous reality becomes the final reality for the insane Blanche who leaves the fields perhaps to cross Lethe with a new figure of psychopomp, who conducts spirits to the other world just as the doctor conducts Blanche to the asylum.

The process of a movement into a world of chaotic absurdity is made by Serafina in The Rose Tattoo. Serafina's "belle reve" is her romantic illusions about her husband, Rosario, and those same illusions in religion about the Madonna. After her husband's death at the





outset of the play, Serafina enters a world of fantasy with the dress-maker's dummies and her unhappy daughter as the only human forms around her. The fantasy is increased by the introduction of Alvaro, the clown-like figure who is identified with Rosario because of his amazing and incredible likeness to him. This absurd character, who makes a farce out of his wooing of Serafina, finally makes Serafina face the truth about her husband's infidelity, thus shattering her previous reality, which was illusion. Serafina, like Blanche, both accepts the fact of illusion and proceeds to create reality out of that illusion. This she achieves by allowing Alvaro to sleep with her as if he were the dead Rosario, finally taking Alvaro as her lover, since she has conceived a child from him. Thus the situation which existed at the beginning of the play is repeated, and Serafina recreates a new illusionary reality out of the fantasy which has gone before. It is as if the very process of theatrical art, the requirement of selectivity from "nature" for art, creates a fantasy, a progression which, in its dramatic presentation, both destroys the old reality and fashions a new reality, which in turn is a new illusion.

Thus for Serafina the process of art makes her enter a fantasy world in her mourning for the dead; Val and Blanche must descend to the underworld; Maggie, Chance and the Princess are transformed to monsters in a world of monsters; Catherine makes a journey, both in



her mind and externally, into the garden of monsters; and Shannon must climb the hill to the Costa Verde. For Val and Blanche the journey to fantasy was a descent to Hades, for Shannon it is reversed to an ascent to the hotel overlooking the green coastline of Mexico.

There is not merely a change of setting in The Night of the Iguana but there is a new form of reality challenged by another new form, until that which finally comes forth is entirely different from the previous and relatively consistent emerging reality of those other plays. In previous plays the optimistic hope of a nobility in mankind is affirmed by the ironical reversal of that affirmation. To be more explicit, Laura begins her journey into fantasy with the optimistic hope and the idealism of mankind. She is challenged by outside reality in the form of the gentleman caller; this momentary experience of humanity when she steps outside of her world of glass, results in a shattering of that world but also in a retraction into it. The dream world of glass has been proven a dream world by the action of the play, and yet it is now reality for Laura. The same process happens to Blanche, Serafina and Val, and through them Williams' philosophy and its optimistic hope for mankind's nobility is affirmed. The change to the later philosophy can first be observed in Suddenly Last Summer: the fantasy of Catherine's journey into a cruel world of cannibalism is affirmed as truth--not any more dream reality but true reality. Sweet





Bird of Youth also affirms a hostile world of monsters where "beanstalk country" is true reality. The people of St. Cloud who finally castrate Monster Chance are just as monstrous as he. The play which follows Sweet Bird of Youth is The Night of the Iguana.

Shannon is living already in a world of reality versus illusion, "the fantastic level" versus "the realistic level,"<sup>11</sup> and while he is dwelling between the two there is a "spook"<sup>12</sup> who haunts him. That Costa Verde is a world of special significance to Shannon and that here his spook can be chased away, with the result that the levels of fantasy and realism join together again, is proven by his constant returning there at such haunted times.<sup>13</sup> However, this journey to Costa Verde is different. One could say that Hannah, Maxine and Nonno represent an internal struggle for Shannon's sanity: that the benevolent anima and the wise old man struggle with the guilt feelings of the hostile anima. The ironical fact that the benevolent anima (Hannah) advises a unification with the hostile anima (Maxine) adds to the probability that this is an internal struggle, for it is the strong sexual and animalistic desires possessed by the hostile anima that cause Shannon's guilt feelings and his resultant martyr complex; the hostile anima must thus be accepted before any individuation can take place.

The aesthetic structure of the play confirms also the theory of





an internal struggle for the reality with which Shannon enters the play is echoed by the reality of these figures in the fantasy world of theatrical art. Shannon has a combined reality of optimism and pessimism: his struggle for priestliness and his awareness of his own animality cause the conflict of neurosis in which we find him at the outset of the play. That struggle is objectified on the stage as a struggle between Hannah and Maxine. The final reality which results from the confrontation in fantasy is a 'Grand Inquisitor' need for illusion.<sup>14</sup> The illusion will be for Shannon to turn his back on his wrath against humanity and against himself; as Hannah says:

I think you will throw away the violent furious sermon, you'll toss it away into the chancel, and. . .lead them beside the still waters because you know how badly they need the still waters Mr. Shannon.<sup>15</sup>

The struggle of a hunted, sinful and guilty man to escape from his state and attain priestliness and holiness must be forgotten in order that man may go on living. The illusion of "the still waters," the need for courage to accept that illusion as reality, when one knows that reality lies elsewhere, is the ultimate irony of this play and, I think, of the later philosophy of Williams himself.

The fostering of the illusion in order to aid one's fellow men and oneself to accept the fact of mortality, of humanity, is the subject of the highly abstracted fantasy: The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More. The apocalyptic figure of Chris, the angelic har-



binger of death, teaches the illusionary reality, which he knows to be illusion, yet which is necessary for survival of the human being:

Oh no, you're nobody's fool, but you're a fool, Mrs. Goforth, if you don't know that finally, sooner or later, you need somebody or something to mean God to you, even if it's a cow in Bombay or a carved rock on the Easter Islands.<sup>16</sup>

That this conclusion or development of Williams' philosophy is a kind of Dostoyevskian compromise with a harsh reality is shown by the fact that Chris Flanders' speech echoes sentiments found in that of the Grand Inquisitor: "Peacefully they will expire in thy name and beyond the grave they will find nothing but death. But we shall keep the secret, and for their happiness we shall allure them with the reward of heaven and eternity."<sup>17</sup> The irony of Chris' position is that he has to preach consolation for the dying he is helping when, like Shannon, he has no definite belief in that consolation himself.

Williams' later philosophy is, then, a reversal of his former beliefs. Barry Callaghan, in an article on Williams' two short plays contained in Slapstick Tragedy (1965), also notes this change in Williams' philosophy: "[The Gnadiges Fraulein] demonstrates that Williams has come full circle. He has exorcised his obsessive sense of guilt and his disgust and rage."<sup>18</sup> He also thinks that the development of the new philosophy first became apparent with Suddenly Last Summer:<sup>19</sup> and our views on the nature of the philosophy agree. "[the] development from Suddenly Last Summer through Sweet Bird of Youth





and The Night of the Iguana to The Gnadiges Fraulein is a kind of stoic grace in the face of the terrors of life."<sup>20</sup>

There is another form of irony to be posited here. If the development of the final dramatic reality to emerge from theatrical presentation is concluded to be a Dostoyevskian compromise, then could it not be possible that the illusionary techniques of dramatic art have deluded their own creator? Is it possible that a world of ogres, a "beanstalk" country has confronted its creator's optimistic hopes for humanity with its ironic destruction of optimism in the theatrical presentation; and its creation of a new illusionary reality, until Williams is himself convinced of the illusion of those hopes and can only create another illusion to take their place: that of enduring for a belief, "a something, a someone"?

The forms of irony found in the plays which embodied Williams' old philosophy were those which I examined in Chapters I and II. The two mythologies, universal and personal, which revealed Williams' criticisms of society and also revealed this earlier philosophy by their ironical juxtaposition have been by-passed in Williams' later plays and the dramatic presentation in these plays has progressed to a form of characterization which has developed from the irony of melodrama which I examined in Chapter II. The technique of using an illusionary surface of melodrama and monstrosity in characterization to capture



the fantasy world of theatre could have seduced the author into a change of philosophy and a loss of the old idealism, and has almost de-humanised the latest forms of his drama.

The fantasy world of theatre is the monstrous imaginary world of the "beanstalk country" in Sweet Bird of Youth and thus it is very apt that Williams' latest play is entitled The Dragon Country. The populace of this country are the role extensions of theatre<sup>21</sup> into the de-humanised world of the monstrous: "Dragon Country, the country of pain, is an uninhabited country which is inhabited though."<sup>22</sup> This same paradoxical union of the monstrous and the human is seen in the play which preceded The Dragon Country, The Gnadiges Fraulein: "I'll give you material for the goddamnedest human and inhuman interest story you ever imagined."<sup>23</sup> The heroine of this, the second part of the Slapstick Tragedy, the Gnadiges Fraulien herself, has qualities which echo the monstrous figure of beanstalk country, the Princess Kosmonopolis of Sweet Bird of Youth. It is interesting to note that both these figures of monstrosity are old actresses, failures from the world of illusion and of ogres. The Princess, as I have already mentioned in Chapter II, speaks of herself as a monster in a monstrous world of theatre and in The Gnadiges Fraulein the same figure is repeated; but this time she is unaware of her own monstrosity, and the world of monsters, previously the theatre, is the



reality in which she is placed. It is as if the monstrous world of the theatre has now become analogous with the monstrous world of reality external to the theatre. The ironies of theatrical presentation appear to have been crystallized into a new philosophy which is, ironically, a reversal of Williams' earlier philosophy--a reversal because of the form in which he chose to embody his philosophy: the theatre.

The final form of irony can be found in the new philosophy itself: that of stoic endurance. The need for endurance for Shannon (The Night of the Iguana) is not only a personal philosophy. The knowledge he has gained of the evil in man and in himself must be endured in silence, for as a priest he must deceive others about the ultimate evil of man and must preach a philosophy opposed to it: one of hope and a promise of peace. The hope and the peace are things of illusion. Ironically Shannon's endurance is both of the evil, of which he is only too aware, and also of the illusions which he must preach as truth. The Gnadiges Fraulein endures her battles with the cocaloony birds, unaware of her increasing monstrosity and finally triumphs in her success of keeping a fish from them. However, she is so mutilated--and unaware of her mutilation--that the fish she has protected is easily stolen from her and she remains triumphant over an empty plate, over something which does not exist. The frau-lein battles against external evil but is blind to her own limitation when





living on "this risky planet"<sup>24</sup> and her optimism is for nothing but illusion. Ironically man's nobility, that which Shannon might preach to his flock, is a thing existing in a world of illusion.

Thus as the theatre exists in realms of illusion so Williams' philosophy appears to be based on an irony related to the form of theatre: on the need for illusion to be endured as a reality in order that we might continue our "tragicomic. . .human existence on this risky planet."<sup>25</sup>



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I wished to study the forms of irony that I observed in the plays of Tennessee Williams.

The ironies of a dramatic production have many manifestations. The most primary manifestation is the first to be studied in Chapter I: that of characterisation. In Williams' plays (until 1964) the characterisation criticised the structure of Southern and, through it, of other societies by utilising the mythical figures of Southern society and confronting them in the drama with Williams' own personal mythology: that of the projections of archetypal figures of the unconscious. Williams, in using universal mythic figures, was tapping at the root of audience-author communication: namely at a form of dramatic communication, which may be said to have developed from ritual, in which the author places on the stage those figures recognisable to the audience as figures of universal myth. To confront these figures with a different personal concept of them, of which the audience is made aware via the characterisation within the play, is an irony which attempts to convey a definite criticism of the old mythology from which a philosophy should emerge. The philosophy which emerges is that Williams expresses in his foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth: "I would





say that there is something much bigger in life and death than we have become aware of in our living and dying."

The second form of irony, which is examined in Chapter II, is that of the dramatic presentation itself. The theatre is a means of conveying irony in many ways because of its form of presentation. That form involves the use of an actor, a role, and communication with the audience of a visual and of an aural form. Those forms of irony which I find in Williams' technique of dramatic presentation are: the human actor versus the inhuman role; the visual ironical use of dance, film, photographs, flags and paintings; and the aural ironical use of music, recitation and semantics. A further irony develops from these techniques when one remembers that Williams was taught by Irwin Piscator who first introduced some of them in Brecht's theatre for the very opposite effect for which Williams uses them. Piscator used the forms of film, music, photograph, flags, and painted symbols to alienate the audience from the nature of the theatrical presentation by making them aware of the illusion; Williams' use of these same techniques enhances the illusions of the dramatic presentation and carries the audience into a world of fantasy. It is because of this that Williams can be criticised on the grounds that his works are melodramatic in form. The final point (and form of irony) to be made in Chapter II is that Williams' plays are indeed theatrically melodramatic--but they are so for ironical



purposes.

The philosophy which was described in Chapter I is examined in Chapter III as an ironical form of vigorous and realistic romanticism and its change is studied until the new philosophy of the later Williams (glimmerings began in 1957--completion 1964) begins to emerge. The emergence of this new philosophy is a form of irony in itself for it is a reversal of the previous philosophy. The fact that this new philosophy is a reversal of earlier beliefs is particularly ironical when one posits the theory, which I do, that it is because of the ironical techniques of dramatic presentation, studied in Chapter II, that the author has changed his beliefs. The result, for the present (1965-66) form of Williams' dramatic presentations, is a de-humanisation of his characters: their adoption of the monstrous inhuman forms of role examined in Chapter II and their departure into worlds of complete illusion and "fantastic allegory."<sup>1</sup>

The final form of irony which concludes the thesis supports the theory that it is the very form of theatre that has changed Williams' philosophy and, in turn, his dramatic presentation. The irony is that the new philosophy, the reversal of the earlier form, is, like the art of theatre which produced it, founded on irony and illusion, for it is based on the concept of the need for the endurance of an illusion of man's nobility in order to continue his living on "this risky planet."<sup>2</sup>



Thus I have--hopefully--emphasised the fundamental importance of the forms of irony in Tennessee Williams' plays, not only as effective theatrical techniques, but also as a means of comprehending Williams' philosophies, and as agents of the change in those philosophies.





## FOOTNOTES

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Ross, Swift and Defoe, 81-82, quoted in Price, Swift's Rhetorical Art, 57.

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Hunnigher, The Origin of the Theater, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>4</sup>Gheon, The Art of Theatre, 10.

<sup>5</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 49.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>7</sup>Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, 188, quoted in Fordham, 54.

<sup>8</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 54.

<sup>9</sup>Edwina Williams gives a detailed account of the natures of both her mother and her daughter, and indeed reveals herself, in her autobiography, Remember Me to Tom. These three women were the most influential in Williams' childhood.

<sup>10</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 60.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>12</sup>Jung and Kerenji, Essays on a Science of Mythology, 99.



<sup>13</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 68. Throughout this thesis I have used those editions of Williams' works which are the fullest and the closest to the revised form of the plays. All are American editions except that of A Streetcar Named Desire which is the British version, found in Four Plays, published by Secker and Warburg after the London production of 1949, and which is fuller than the American New Directions edition of the play. This latter edition appears to be based on the 1947 New York production of the play and has been cut and changed, perhaps by the director, Elia Kazan.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 97, 95.

<sup>17</sup>Williams, American Blues, 6. Cf. above n. 13.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>19</sup>Williams, Summer and Smoke, 124.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>22</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 54.

<sup>23</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 105.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>26</sup>Williams, Summer and Smoke, 146.

<sup>27</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 54; cf. above n. 8.

<sup>28</sup>Williams, Summer and Smoke, 235.

<sup>29</sup>Williams, The Milk Train. . . ., 28.





- <sup>30</sup>Williams, The Night of the Iguana, 7.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.
- <sup>35</sup>Fordham, Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 60.
- <sup>36</sup>Williams, The Night of the Iguana, 123.
- <sup>37</sup>Williams, The Unsatisfactory Supper, 12.
- <sup>38</sup>Orpheus Descending is the later version of Battle of Angels.
- <sup>39</sup>Williams, Preface to Orpheus Descending, vi.
- <sup>40</sup>Cf. above n. 11.
- <sup>41</sup>Williams, Orpheus Descending, 116-7.
- <sup>42</sup>Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, 3.
- <sup>43</sup>Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, 4.
- <sup>44</sup>Williams, Remember Me to Tom, 135, 138.
- <sup>45</sup>Williams, The Night of the Iguana, 78.
- <sup>46</sup>Williams, The Milk Train. . . . ., 40.
- <sup>47</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, 109.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 325.
- <sup>49</sup>Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, 62.
- <sup>50</sup>Jung, Psyche and Symbol, 11.
- <sup>51</sup>Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, 258.



<sup>52</sup>Williams, The Glass Menagerie, 19.

<sup>53</sup>Williams, Summer and Smoke, 219.

<sup>54</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 91.

## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>Blau, The Impossible Theater, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Brecht, Plays, Vol. 1, 101. The reference is to Peachum's first speech in The Threepenny Opera.

<sup>3</sup>Willet, Brecht on Theatre, 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>6</sup>Huizinga, Homo Ludens, 25.

<sup>7</sup>Blau, The Impossible Theater, 6. "Irony is built into the form [of drama] where people pretend to be what they are not."

<sup>8</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire and Moony's Kid Don't Cry.

<sup>9</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 84.

<sup>10</sup>Williams, Baby Doll and The Rose Tattoo.

<sup>11</sup>Williams, The Rose Tattoo, 76.

<sup>12</sup>Williams, Baby Doll, 135, 133, 113.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>14</sup>An anima figure in Sweet Bird of Youth who alone (mono) finds the whole world (kosmos) her home (polis).

<sup>15</sup>Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 33.



- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 114.
- <sup>18</sup> Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>23</sup> Williams, American Blues, 22.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 15--"unemployed" is echoed by "laid off."
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 18.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 77.
- <sup>30</sup> The use of lighting from the outside setting--a brightly lit night club, "The Four Deuces."
- <sup>31</sup> Williams, Remember Me to Tom, 208.
- <sup>32</sup> Turner, The Element of Irony in English Literature, 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 23.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 26.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>37</sup> D. H. Lawrence is the subject of Williams' short play I Rise in Flame, cried the Phoenix.





- <sup>38</sup>Lawrence, Twilight in Italy, 75.
- <sup>39</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 64.
- <sup>40</sup>Williamson, The Donne Tradition, 90-98 and specifically linking love and death, 91-92.
- <sup>41</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 66.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>45</sup>Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, 289.
- <sup>46</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 30.
- <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>48</sup>Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent, 289.
- <sup>49</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 86.
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>51</sup>Gheon, The Art of Theatre, 4.
- <sup>52</sup>Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads, 79.
- <sup>53</sup>Sievers, Freud on Broadway, 372.
- <sup>54</sup>Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, 300. (The author defines the alienation effect and the techniques used to achieve it.)
- <sup>55</sup>Willet, Brecht on Theatre, 131.
- <sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.
- <sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.
- <sup>58</sup>Williams, The Glass Menagerie; Scenes 6-7 there are fourteen legends.



- <sup>59</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 123.
- <sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.
- <sup>63</sup>Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, 93.
- <sup>64</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 31.
- <sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>66</sup>Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, 88.
- <sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup>Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth, 96.
- <sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup>Williams, The Glass Menagerie, 111-112.
- <sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>73</sup>Turner, The Element of Irony in English Literature, 9.
- <sup>74</sup>Williams, Orpheus Descending, 12.
- <sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.
- <sup>76</sup>Williams, "The Past, the Present, and the Perhaps," (ii).
- <sup>77</sup>Williams, Suddenly Last Summer, 37.
- <sup>78</sup>Williams, The Milk Train . . . . ., 7-8.
- <sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*





<sup>80</sup>Williams, Remember Me to Tom, 244.

<sup>81</sup>Turner, The Element of Irony in English Literature, 9.

### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>Examined in Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup>Examined in Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup>Blau, The Impossible Theater, 26.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, "The Past, the Present, and the Perhaps," v.

<sup>5</sup>Williams, "The Foreword to Sweet Bird of Youth," xi.

<sup>6</sup>Sharpe, Irony in the Drama, viii.

<sup>7</sup>One hopes that the audience grasps the ironies underlying the reversal and perceives the reality presented below it.

<sup>8</sup>In all these plays the hope for a "bigger" quality in mankind is challenged and destroyed by the prevalent pessimistic reality.

<sup>9</sup>Bentley, Life of the Drama, 150.

<sup>10</sup>Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, 189.

<sup>11</sup>Williams, The Night of the Iguana, 69.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>14</sup>Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamasov.

<sup>15</sup>Williams, The Night of the Iguana, 57.

<sup>16</sup>Williams, The Milk Train . . . . ., 89.

<sup>17</sup>Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamasov, 195.



<sup>18</sup>B. Callaghan, "Tennessee Williams and the Cocaloony Birds," Tamarrac Review, (Spring, '66), 57.

<sup>19</sup>Above, Chapter III, 7.

<sup>20</sup>B. Callaghan, "Tennessee Williams and the Cocaloony Birds," Tamarrac Review, (Spring, '66), 55.

<sup>21</sup>Above, Chapter II, 41.

<sup>22</sup>Williams, "I can't Imagine Tomorrow," (the first part of the longer "Dragon Country"), Esquire, March 1966, 78.

<sup>23</sup>Williams, "Slapstick Tragedy: Two Plays by Tennessee Williams," (the second of which is the Gnadiges Fraulein), Esquire, August 1965, 102.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

### Conclusion

<sup>1</sup>Williams, "Slapstick Tragedy," Esquire, August 1965, 95.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



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